The Jews of Russia and Poland

Israel Friedlaender

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The Jews of Russia and Poland

A Bird's-eye View of their History and Culture

DEC 9 1915

By

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Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America

With a Map

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1915

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The Knickerbocker Press, New York

To

MY WIFE AND HELPMATE

September 26, 1915

PREFACE

THE present publication is based on a course of lectures which, at the invitation of Dr. Cyrus Adler, President of the Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning in Philadelphia, I delivered before that Institution in the month of March. The choice of the subject had been prompted by the timely interest which an historic sketch of the Polish and Russian Jews must possess at the present moment when nearly half of the great world-struggle is being fought out on a territory which is officially designated as their Pale of Settlement. I had felt considerable reluctance in venturing beyond the domain of my regular scientific studies which lie in a different direction. But the recognition of the importance of the task at this unique juncture and the astonishing fact that no one had come forward to undertake it helped me in overcoming my original hesitation. The same consideration is now actuating me in bringing my literary attempt before a wider public. In doing so, I do not claim to offer new and independent results of investigation, but rather to summarize the results obtained by others. My own credentials are limited to a profound interest in the

subject, free access to the authorities dealing with it, and to early personal observations of country and people.

The information gathered in the following pages, though not based on original research, is yet drawn from trustworthy sources. The specialist will have no difficulty in identifying the authorities I have followed, while the general reader will be scarcely interested in knowing them. There is only one source which deserves special mention, because I owe to it a larger debt than to any other. I refer to the very elaborate history of the *Jews in Poland and Russia*, written in Russian by S. M. Dubnow, which originally formed a part of his general history of the Jewish people and has now been thoroughly revised and recast by the author for the English edition which is to be issued under the auspices of the Jewish Publication Society of America. Having been entrusted with the English translation of this Polish-Jewish history, I had full opportunity to familiarize myself with this standard work, which, like all the writings of this celebrated Russian-Jewish author, combines painstaking research with literary charm. Indeed, I should not have thought to come forward with my own popular sketch, were it not for the unavoidable delay which attaches to the publication of so large a volume and for the radically different character of my own literary effort.

However, though I have relied upon my authorities as to the facts, I have yet ventured to follow my own judgment as far as their presentation and interpretation are concerned. The responsibility in this regard is entirely my own.

I have entitled this sketch of Polish-Jewish history and culture "a bird's-eye view," not only to disclaim any special scientific merits for it, but to emphasize at the same time its essentially *popular* tendency. I have not written for scholars but for the people at large who may desire to inform themselves, in a concise and none too laborious a manner, about this important and timely subject. I have endeavoured to bring out the larger bearings of the problem, without entangling myself in the less important details. I have kept this character of the publication steadily in view, also where minor matters were concerned. I refer in particular to the puzzling difficulties attending the transcription of Hebrew and Slavonian terms which I have simplified as far as was in my power.[1]

[1] I have spelled all such words without any regard to their etymological correctness and in such a way as to indicate their pronunciation to the English reader. As far as I am aware, I have departed from this rule only in two cases in which I have followed the conventional transcription: in *Czar* (pronounce *Tzar*, with a soft semi-vowel at the end which cannot be marked in English) and in *ukase* (pronounce *ookaz*, with the accent on the last syllable). *Zh* has been used to indicate the Slavonian sound which corresponds to the French *j*. *U* in all such words is to be pronounced like the English *oo*. The plural of Hebrew words has been indicated, as in English, by *s*, strange though it may

The map appended to this volume is designed, in a similar way, to meet the purely practical requirements of the general reader.

To those who may recoil before the gloomy picture of human misery and human cruelty drawn on these pages I would retort in the same way as did little Tom at school who, on being quizzed as to who wrote the *Magna Charta*, apologetically replied: "*I* haven't done it." I have not tried to exaggerate. Exaggeration was, indeed, unnecessary and would scarcely have been possible. I am sorry that I have found myself unable to follow the conventional view which regards the admission of the Jews into Poland and the treatment accorded to them in that country as an act of generosity on the part of the Polish people. Pleasing as it would have been to be able to point at least to one bright spot in the impenetrable darkness of mediæval Jew-hatred, an unbiassed study of the facts forces one, in my opinion, to the conclusion that this attitude towards the Jews was prompted by none other than utilitarian considerations for which the Poles perhaps need not be blamed but for which they certainly deserve no credit.

I have written this book frankly as a Jew, without attempting to disguise my sympathy with the

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appear to the student of Hebrew. Only in one or two cases I have found myself compelled to resort to the Hebrew ending of the plural, which is *im*.

Jews in the lands of the Slavs who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, continue to endure all the agonies of the Middle Ages. Indeed, I know of no moral principle which would command us to feel less keenly the sufferings of our fellowmen, merely because, in addition to our common humanity, we happen to be linked to them by the community of race, religion, and association. I can honestly say, however, that, while this sympathy may have coloured the style of my narrative, I have not, to the best of my knowledge, allowed it to colour its contents. Without pretending to be indifferent, I have endeavoured to remain unbiassed. If my judgment of Polish misrule, or rather the misrule of the Polish nobility, should appear too harsh, I would remind the reader that similar opinions have been voiced by many a patriotic Pole. And if I have interpreted the attitude of Russian autocracy towards the Jews as a consistent attempt to destroy Jews and Judaism in that country, this view has been anticipated by many an unbiassed Russian. Nay, it has occasionally been uttered in public by official representatives of Czardom.

In my account of the inner development of the Jews of Russia and Poland I have endeavoured to follow the same policy of frankness. Filled as I am with admiration for the intellectualism and idealism which mark, to a truly astounding degree, Polish-Jewish life in its genuine environment,—an

admiration which would be general were it not for the fact that the forms in which that life manifests itself are strange and, therefore, unattractive to us,—I have not hesitated to point to the many negative features which are the result of the one-sided development of Polish and Russian Jewry. To the self-respecting Jew nothing is more revolting than the apologetic attitude which some of his modern coreligionists are prone to assume in the presence of non-Jews. If we Jews have our faults we are just as much entitled to them as any other section of mortals. A race which, in the face of uninterrupted and unparalleled persecution,—and this applies to the Polish Jews as well as to the Jews as a whole,—has neither surrendered its identity nor sunk to the level of gypsies, but has managed to preserve its mental and moral vigour and has remained a powerful factor in the life of civilized humanity, can well afford to own to its share of human frailty. The Jewish historian need not apologize for it. All he may do is to account for it, by pointing to the historic factors which have produced it.

While the present sketch, being an account of the past, stops deliberately at the threshold of contemporary events, this is perhaps the place to say a word as to the way in which the modern Jews react on the treatment which is meted out to their race in the lands of the Slavs. It would be hypocrisy to maintain that the present-day

Jew is insensible of the terrible sufferings and indignities which continue to be heaped upon his fellow-Jews both in Russia and in Poland and which have been so grievously accentuated in the course of this war. But it would be an equal mistake to think that the only too natural resentment of the Jew extends indiscriminately to the inhabitants of those countries. True, the Jews were not told to love their enemies. Yet they were enjoined to judge their neighbours in righteousness (Leviticus xix., 15), and they have themselves suffered too long from the human habit of generalization to indulge in a wholesale condemnation of entire peoples. The thinking Jew is neither blind to the fine and charming qualities which distinguish the Polish nation and their culture. Nor is he forgetful of the sterling virtues which are inherent in the character of the great Russian people. Indeed, he is looking forward to the time when, under a happier constellation, the Jewry of Russia and Poland may, side by side with these two nations with which it has lived together from the very dawn of their history, march on the road of human progress and happiness. The Jews, to repeat a famous saying of their Rabbis, hate wrong but not wrongdoers. And writing, as I do this, on the eve of the Jewish New Year, I can find no better way of expressing the sentiments with which the Jews of today are looking forward to the termination of the terrible

world-conflict than by quoting the words of the solemn liturgy which for nearly two thousand years has ushered in the religious season of Judaism:

Then shall the just be glad, and the upright shall exult, and the pious triumphantly rejoice, while iniquity shall close her mouth, and all wickedness shall be wholly consumed like smoke, when thou makest the dominion of violence to pass away from the earth.

I. F.

New York,
September 8, 1915.

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INTRODUCTION

IN a sublime vision, quivering with human sympathy and brotherly emotion, the Prophet Isaiah pictures to us the agony of a band of Judeans who had been driven into the land of the Edomites. Exasperated by the grinding oppression of this mortal enemy of their people, his exiled brethren call to him from afar, anxiously inquiring when their sufferings are likely to take an end. "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" But the Prophet, though tortured by compassion and suspense, is honest enough to tell them that he knows of no answer. The light of delivery and the gloom of misery are flitting successively across his prophetic vision and he sadly replies: "The morning cometh, but also the night; if ye will inquire, inquire again; come ye, return."

The American Jews of today find themselves in a similarly tragic situation. Our brethren among the modern Edomites, ground by relentless persecutions, and now maddened by the horrors of warfare, cry to us in their despair: "Watchmen, what of the night? Watchmen, what of the night?" But if we be honest we must broken-heartedly confess that we know of no answer. Gleams of light and blotches of darkness dance in blinding confusion before our mind's eye, and all we can do is to repeat with the Prophet Isaiah: "The morning cometh, but also the night; if ye will inquire, inquire again; come ye, return."

But while we are waiting in agonies of suspense, let us not become a prey to inactive stupor. Let us take care that when the horizon has cleared and our unfortunate brethren from afar apply again for advice, we are able to give them a clear unequivocal answer, an answer that is not prompted by the passing whims of the moment, but one that is based on the foundations of our past and is fully in accord with our historic development.

The title of this volume as well as the arrangement of the material call for a few words of explanation. It will become obvious in the course of this book that the Jews of Russia, in the specific sense of this geographical term, do *not* constitute the problem which we generally associate with that name. The Jews in Russia proper, that is, outside

the so-called Pale of Settlement, are a negligible quantity. They form but a fraction of one per cent. of the general population, and, though harassed and vexed by an unfriendly government, are so few in number and are scattered over such a tremendously vast area, that neither numerically nor economically nor culturally can they lay claim to our particular attention. The bulk of what generally goes by the name of Russian Jewry, constituting no less than half of the Jewish people throughout the world, lives—if that mode of existence may be honoured by the term "living"—in the Pale of Settlement, that is, on the tract of land which is practically identical with the ancient Empire of Poland. They are neither a part nor a product of the Russian Empire, which almost from its very inception down to this day has systematically shut its gates to the Jews. They are merely an inheritance, which, with the dying Kingdom of Poland, fell into the lap of Russia.

Hence, when we speak of the Jews of Russia and Poland, we do not refer to two different geographical groups, but rather to two different periods in the life of the same group. We shall, therefore, deal in the first chapter with the Jews under the Polish régime—that is, during the time that the Polish Empire was in existence,—and treat in the second chapter of the same Polish Jews when they came under the régime of Russia, after the dissolution of Poland.

As for the inner life of this Russo-Polish Jewry, it was little affected by the political transition, owing to the strict isolation of the Jews from their environment. The spiritual development of the Jews under the Russian régime forms, down to the latter end of the nineteenth century, an uninterrupted continuation of the preceding period of Polish rule, while the radical changes which we witness in Russian Jewish life in our own days are not the result of political causes but are due in the main to spiritual influences. Hence the third chapter of our book will present an unbroken account of this inner development of Russo-Polish Jewry.

CHAPTER I

THE JEWS UNDER THE POLISH RÉGIME

WHILE during the period of Russian dominion, which will engage us in the second chapter, the fate of Jewry, owing to the autocratic character of the Russian Empire, has depended almost entirely on the attitude of the individual rulers and has been but loosely connected with the destinies of the Russian people,—during the period of Polish independence, with its numerous centrifugal forces, which at first limited and finally annihilated the authority of the monarchs, the history of the Jews was the resultant of an extremely complicated interaction of social factors. The history of the Polish Jews is indissolubly bound up with the history of Poland, just as the history of Poland is inseparably interwoven with the history of the Jews. It is, therefore, necessary to premise our account of the Jews in Poland by a survey of the political and social development of Poland in general.

Rise of the Polish Empire

The history of Poland, both in its political and social aspect, hinges on the year 1572, when the

last king of the Yaguello dynasty died without issue, and Poland was converted into a republic with an elective king at its head. The period prior to 1572 is marked by the centripetal restraint of royal authority; the period after 1572 is characterized by the centrifugal influence of the Polish nobility, or the Shlakhta. The royal period marks the rise, the Shlakhta period marks the decline of Poland, and we shall afterwards learn that the rise and decline of Polish Jewry follow exactly the same line of development.

The beginnings of Polish history go back to the middle of the ninth century, when the Polish tribes were organized by *Piast*,—a semi-mythical personage who became the founder of the Polish monarchy and the progenitor of the Piast dynasty which occupied the throne of Poland until 1386. One of his descendants, Boleslav III, divided in 1138 his dominions among his children, with the result that Poland fell asunder into a number of independent principalities, the most important among them being Great Poland, with the leading cities of Posen and Kalish, Little Poland, with Lublin and Cracow, the province of Mazovia, with the city of Warsaw, the province of Red Russia, roughly corresponding to what is today called Eastern Galicia, with Lemberg (or Lvov), while Silesia gradually drifted into the German sphere of influence and was forever lost to Poland.

From this state of political dismemberment,

which brought the Polish lands to the verge of political and economic ruin, Poland was rescued by another descendant of Piast, Vladislav I, who in 1306 united the two provinces of Great Poland and Little Poland and restored the royal title. His famous son, Casimir III, or the Great, who reigned from 1333 to 1370, consolidated the restored empire, increasing it by the addition of the important province of Red Russia. However, the crucial event in the expansion of Poland took place in the year 1386, when Yadviga, a grandniece of Casimir and heir to the Polish crown, offered hand and throne to Yaguello, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, who thereupon became the King of Poland and the founder of the royal dynasty of the Yaguellos which ruled over the united lands of Poland and Lithuania from 1386 to 1572.

The alliance between the Kingdom of Poland, or the Crown, as it was generally called, and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was at first of a purely dynastic character, but led in successive stages to the amalgamation of the two countries in 1569, was fraught with tremendous issues for the further development of the Polish people. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was originally limited to the region around Vilna and Kovno, had, during the fourteenth century, enormously grown at the expense of the neighbouring Russians, who, to use the phrase of a contemporaneous chronicler, fled before the Lithuanians "like hares

before the hunter." The population of the Grand Duchy was accordingly of a composite character. The ruling class was made up of Lithuanians, a race akin to the modern Prussians, who had remained pagans until the end of the fourteenth century, when the political allurements of Poland drew them into the fold of Roman Catholicism, while the bulk of the population was made up of the inhabitants of the conquered Russian provinces who were Russians, or Ruthenians, by race and Greek Orthodox by faith.

Through the alliance with Lithuania, Poland grew into a vast empire, which extended from the banks of the Niemen to the shores of the Black Sea, and from the Oder into the very heart of modern European Russia, including Kiev, "the mother of Russian cities." The incorporation of a huge population professing a different creed saved Poland from the orgies of Roman fanaticism, which were for centuries the curse of Western Europe. On the other hand, the existence within her midst of a vast heterogeneous population which gravitated toward the rising power of Muscovy was a source of national weakness, and subsequently proved an important factor in the process of Polish disintegration.

The further steps in the expansion of Poland are marked by the extension of her sovereignty over the territory of the modern province of West Prussia in the north and of the territory now

covered by Roumania in the south. In 1525, the duchy of Mazovia was added, and the principal city of that province, Warsaw, which up to the end of the sixteenth century had remained outside the range of general Polish history, became the capital of the united empire, thus succeeding the former two capitals, Cracow and Vilna. The final increase in Polish territory took place in 1562, ten years before the death of the last Yaguello, by the annexation of Courland and Livonia, controlling the trade on the Baltic.

It will thus be seen that at the height of her expansion the Polish monarchy covered an area, which down to this day harbours the bulk of the Jewish population of Europe. It will also be observed that, as far as modern Russia is concerned, her Jewish Pale of Settlement coincides with the boundaries of ancient Poland, forming a magic line beyond which the Jew has not been permitted to penetrate down to this day.

Decline and Fall of the Polish Empire

The year 1572 marks the end of Poland's expansion and the beginning of her disintegration. The first manifestation of the latter process took place in 1648,—a year just as fatal in the history of the Jews,—when the Russian population of the border provinces, or the Ukraïna (a word meaning "border") revolted against the Polish dominion

and finally invoked the aid of the neighbouring Russians. From that time onward the Russian bear plunged his claws deeper and deeper into the flesh of Poland. The province of Little Russia, a part of the Ukraïna, comprising the present governments of Poltava and Chernigov, was ceded to Russia in 1654. After that time the dismemberment of Poland proceeded in rapid stages, culminating in the first partition of Poland in 1772, when a fourth of Polish territory was divided among Russia, Austria, and Prussia.

The first partition of Poland was followed, after an unsuccessful attempt at national regeneration, by a second partition in 1793, and, in spite of the heroic resistance led by Kosciuszko, by a third partition in 1795, which sealed the fate of the Polish Empire. As a result of this last partition, Russia acquired all the territories of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Austria received Galicia, and Prussia the province of Great Poland with Posen, and the province of Mazovia with Warsaw.

A short lease of life was granted to Poland through the grace of the Empire-builder Napoleon, when, after having shattered the Prussian power, he formed her Polish possessions into the semi-independent Duchy of Warsaw, under the rule of the King of Saxony. The fall of Napoleon marked the fall of the new Polish Commonwealth. The Congress of Vienna, which met in 1815, sanctioned the distribution of Polish territory such as still

prevails today, except that the city of Cracow was segregated into a diminutive Polish republic, which, after a somewhat tumultous career, was abolished by Austria in 1846.

The territory of what is today called Russian Poland comprising the former Duchy of Warsaw, was adjudged at the Vienna Congress to Russia, but it was allowed to retain its political and cultural autonomy under the title of the "Kingdom of Poland," including a Polish king in the person of the Russian Emperor, a native civil administration, its own language, and even its own army and flag. The insurrection of 1830 gave Russia the opportunity to withdraw her pledges. The Kingdom of Poland was incorporated into the Russian Empire under the title "Vistulaland," the very name of Poland thus being blotted out of existence. Since that time Russia has endeavoured, with a persistence and cruelty, which assumed unheard-of proportions after the last Polish insurrection of 1863, to annihilate the Polish race and to suppress the faintest manifestation of Polish national life down to the very threshold of the present war, when the northern bear, cornered by his hunters, relaxed his murderous squeeze into a clumsy caress.

The Polish Nobility, or Shlakhta

The social history of Poland follows the same lines of division. Its determining factor is the claim of the Polish nobility, or the Shlakhta, to

absolute, unrestricted control within the State. The abolition of hereditary monarchy in 1572 marks the triumph of the Shlakhta,—and the beginning of Poland's downfall.

The history of the Jews in Poland is with a thousand different threads bound up with this social struggle, and it is of the utmost importance to our subject to gain a clear insight into its causes and progress.

During the primitive period of her history, Poland was divided, like most other countries, into two classes, or rather races,—the conquerors and the conquered. The conquering tribe, or *the* tribe *par excellence*—"Shlakhta" is probably derived from the same root as the German *Geschlecht*—became the owners of the soil, while the conquered tribe became the workers of the soil. During the period of political dismemberment, between 1138 and 1306, the Shlakhta, aided by the absence of royal authority, managed to subdue their peasants by turning them into serfs, or *khlops*, and to reduce them to the position of veritable beasts of burden, a position in which they were kept down to the very end of Polish independence. Unhindered by royal interference, the Shlakhta then proceeded to assume absolute control over the affairs of the State by organizing itself in *Sayms*, representative assemblies or diets, thus laying the ground for one of the earliest parliamentary organizations in Europe.

This process is not without its parallels in the history of other nations. Unlike, however, all other nations, it did not result in the rise of a feudal system with its distinctions and discriminations; on the contrary, it may well be said that five hundred years prior to the French Revolution, the Polish nation,—for the Shlakhta was at that time co-extensive with the Polish nation,—endeavoured to realize the three great principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Liberty was, and has ever remained, the idol of the Polish Shlakhta. "If fatherland," says Heine, a sympathetic observer of Polish life, "be the first word of the Polish nobleman, liberty is his second." This burning love of liberty prevented the Shlakhta as a group from tolerating the rule of another power, be it the influence of another estate, or the authority of a king, and made it impossible for an individual member of the Shlakhta, or the Shlakhchitz, to dominate another member of his caste. In this way liberty implied the absolute equality of the Shlakhta, every member of which down to the very end of Poland had an equal share in the management of the State, as represented by the national assembly, or the *Saym*. This political equality was accompanied by social equality or fraternity, for the Shlakhta repudiated all social discriminations—the titles of the Polish nobility are a late importation from abroad—and its members designated one another as brothers, a

form of address which has survived down to this day.

Thus the Polish aristocracy was turned into an autocracy; the State became an estate. *L'état c'est moi*, in the literal sense of the word, became the inviolable principle of the Shlakhta and its slogan in the coming struggle against the two rival powers which arose to dispute its authority: the dominion of the king and the power of the middle class.

Triumph of the Shlakhta over Royalty and Burghers

The restoration of Poland in 1306 brought both of these powers upon the scene. The Polish monarchy was, from its earliest beginning, constitutionally limited by the power of parliament as controlled by the nobility. But the Shlakhta, which was anti-monarchic in principle as well as in temperament, was impatient of the slightest manifestation of royal interference. With a perseverance and an adroitness which one does not generally associate with Polish nobility, the Shlakhta was on the lookout for every favourable opportunity to reduce the power of the crown and to wrest from it greater and greater privileges. This tendency was held in check as long as the two dynasties of the Piasts and the Yaguellos were firmly entrenched upon the throne. When, however, the last scion of the Yaguellos died in 1572 without issue, it immediately asserted itself and Poland

was converted into a republic with an elective king as its chief magistrate. In other words the Polish state fell again into the absolute control of the Shlakhta, with a royal puppet as a plaything in their hands.

More formidable was the other rival, the rising middle class, the townspeople or the burghers.

During the preceding partitional period, Poland had, by political disintegration and the repeated raids of the Tatars, been turned into a wilderness. To raise the country from its economic helplessness, Vladislav I, the restorer of Polish royalty, and still more so his great son Casimir, encouraged the immigration of German settlers into Poland. These settlers, consisting mostly of tradesmen and handicraftsmen, an element entirely lacking in primitive Poland, were to supply the missing middle class or the *tiers état*. To safeguard the newcomers against the encroachments of the nobility, the Polish king granted them the so-called "Magdeburg Law," which guaranteed to them complete autonomy in the cities to be inhabited by them. The German immigrants succeeded by their thrift and industry in bringing prosperity into the land, and to lay their impress upon its civilization. The traces of this German immigration are still visible today not only in the Polish vocabulary, in which the very word for commerce is still *handel*, but also in the Polish hatred against everything German,—a hatred even more intense

than the hostility to the Russian oppressor, for in the former case the hatred is accentuated by admiration, in the latter case it is mitigated by contempt.

But the new settlers, who, aided by the sense of order and discipline, soon covered the country with a net of well-organized municipalities and flourishing merchant guilds and trade-unions, also bade fair to become formidable political rivals. The Shlakhta was quick to perceive the new danger and rapidly declared war upon their opponents. The deadliest weapon in the hands of the Shlakhta, which economically had been easily outrun by the burghers, was the legislative power of the Diet which was still at their absolute disposal, and by means of this political steam-roller they succeeded in crushing completely the political ambitions of their competitors. The Diet of 1496 decreed that no burgher was allowed to hold land outside the towns, and since land-holding was an indispensable prerequisite for the noble rank, and noble rank, in turn, was an indispensable prerequisite for participation in the Diet, this law once for all checked the political advance of the burghers.

A further set of laws granting all kinds of economic privileges to the Shlakhta, such as freedom from customs and income tax, and throwing the whole burden of the State upon the burghers, throttled the commercial development of the

middle class. Finally the so-called sumptuary laws, which forbade the burghers to conduct themselves outwardly as the Shlakhta, for instance, to wear the dress of a noble or to shave their beards after the same pattern, sealed the social degradation of the middle class. As a result, the burghers were now thrust back into their original positions, the towns and cities, where they continued to exercise their old prerogatives of self-government, —a fact of vital importance in the history of the Jews of Poland,—but they were reduced to utter impotence as far as the affairs of the State were concerned. The Shlakhta was able to vindicate its principle: *l'état c'est moi.*

This process was accomplished in the latter part of the sixteenth century, about the same time when the death of the last scion of the Yaguellos resulted in the triumph of the Shlakhta over the royal power. The victory of the Shlakhta was complete,—but it was a Pyrrhic victory. For the Shlakhta possessed none of the qualifications which might have enabled the country to dispense either with the economic services of the middle class or with the political restraint of royal authority.

Effects of Shlakhta Rule

Here we find ourselves face to face with certain characteristics in the make-up of the Shlakhta, which were just as decisive for the development of

Poland as they were for the history of Polish Jewry. Alongside of many admirable qualities which lend a peculiar charm to many aspects of Polish life, the Shlakhta reveals a glaring lack of just those virtues which make for permanent success in economic and political life. To be sure, generalizations are invidious, and no one has greater reason to beware of them than has the Jew, but all students of the Polish past and observers of present-day Polish life seem to be unanimously agreed on the subject.

The most striking characteristic of the Shlakhta is its love of liberty, but this liberty is not the Kantian freedom, which manifests itself in self-restraint, but that morbid liberty which degenerates into the most appalling *lack* of self-restraint. This spirit of misconceived liberty, or rather license, shows itself in the hostile and even contemptuous attitude towards work which has characterized the Shlakhta throughout the ages. And coupled with this indolence is a marked tendency towards extravagance and prodigality. Politically, this lack of self-restraint reveals itself in inconstancy and instability, rendering impossible both the positive capacity of directing and the passive virtue of obeying. To quote the words of George Brandes, who up to a few months ago was as much idolized by the Poles as the Poles were idolized by him, the Poles are: "Obstinate, combative, and quarrelsome, recognizing no higher law

than their own will." And, above all, the Poles, who are proud of comparing themselves with the French, are fond of show and externalities, lacking the solemn sincerity of the Germans and the crude directness of the Russians. They are inclined to place form above content and to prefer shadow to substance.

These characteristics, fatal in economic life no less than in the sphere of politics, bear the main responsibility for the economic and political disintegration of Poland. They account for the fact that the Polish Empire, in spite of its enormous natural resources, became one of the most destitute countries of the world, in which the only seeds of civilization were planted and cultivated by Germans and Jews. They explain at the same time the fact that one of the oldest parliamentary peoples in Europe became a byword among the nations for lawlessness and misgovernment.

The fruits of these fatal characteristics came to light immediately after 1572. The conversion of the Polish monarchy into a republic after the extinction of the Yaguello dynasty was the logical outcome of the previous political development of Poland. But the monstrous imposition of an elective royalty on a republican structure was merely a reflection of the Polish love for externalities. For the king was deprived of all the authority generally associated with royalty. He had no power either over the military or political or ad-

ministrative or financial affairs of the State, all of which were concentrated in the *Saym*, as controlled by the Shlakhta. Nor could the Polish king, the creature of elections—and elections of a most degrading character, in which not only political intrigues, but shameless and undisguised graft played a most important rôle—radiate even a scintilla of that divinity which doth hedge a king. "*We* are the electors of the kings." These words were brutally flaunted in the face of Sigismund III, at the Diet of 1604. "You may *reign* but you dare not *rule*." Nor was the king, in this respect far beneath his subjects among the Shlakhta, unrestricted in his personal freedom. He was under the constant supervision of the nobles; he was frequently bullied and insulted more than his commonest citizen, and we have at least two cases on record in which successful candidates for the Polish throne secretly fled from the royal honour and had to be pursued by Polish horsemen.

This farce of royalty might perhaps have proved less pernicious, if the Shlakhta, which more than ever claimed to be the nation, had adhered, as it did formerly, to its noble principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and if the Saym, controlled by them, had remained the source of authority and government. Unfortunately, however, the fate of these principles was like that of royalty: the shell was retained but the kernel was destroyed and turned into its very opposite. With the

loosening of royal authority a few noble families managed to concentrate the whole wealth of the country in their hands, while the rest of the Shlakhta, the smaller squires, sank to the level of the degraded peasants, or khlops. Being precluded by law from following the occupation of the burgher or the peasant,—for in both cases he lost his noble rank,—the Polish squire had no other choice than to enter the service of the big lord, or the Pan, thus swelling his retinue. As a result, Poland fell into the hands of a few families, such as the Pototzkis, Zamoyskis, Chartoryskis, Radziwills, Sapiehas, *e tutti quanti*,—all names full of haunting memories to Polish-Jewish ears,—who ruled over whole provinces and, surrounded by thousands of squires, were infinitely more prosperous and infinitely more powerful than the king. To be sure, liberty still remained the watchword of the Shlakhta, but it was not, to quote Heine again, "The true divine liberty of a Washington; only a very small section, men such as Kosciuszko, grasped the meaning of the latter and sought to propagate it." [Liberty] "was only the slogan of the nobility, which endeavoured to squeeze out of the king as many privileges as possible, and in this manner to bring about a state of anarchy."

The liberty of the Pans degenerated into the most atrocious form of licence. They ruled over their dominions with almost incredible tyranny, trampling under foot the most elementary rights of

human life and honour, except that this tyranny, not being dictated by any principle or policy, but rather reflecting the fleeting whimsicalities of an unrestrained temper, was aimless and reckless, and was occasionally relieved by flashes of just as aimless and reckless magnanimity. As for the small squire, externally, to be sure, he remained on terms of equality and fraternity with the Pan; he had exactly the same voting power at the Saym as his most serene paymaster, but in reality he was nothing but a miserable tool in the hands of his lord, helping to carry out his political ambitions. He was, just as ever, addressed by the Pan as "brother," with that exquisite mixture of courtesy and brutality with which even a Pole of today is prone to exclaim: "*Kochany Bracie, idź do diabla,*" "Beloved brother, go to Hell." He was oppressed and maltreated like the khlop. The Pan would occasionally crop his nose and ears and would frequently flog him, with that, from the Polish point of view, essential distinction, that the squire was never flogged unless a rug was placed beneath him.

Finally the Saym, the Diet, the fountain-head of authority and government in Polish lands, did not escape the same fatal transformation. The procedure and the forms of parliamentary government were observed as rigidly as ever, except that parliamentary government itself became a farce as miserable as Polish royalty. The Saym became a

seething cauldron of strife and dissension, and the hot-bed of the terrible jealousy of the great noble houses, a jealousy so mortal that when the Russian bayonets were already blocking the road to the Polish chamber, and it was thought that a coalition between the Chartoryskis and the Pototzkis was the only means of averting the impending ruin, the former replied that they preferred the tyranny of Muscovy to the tyranny of their fellow-nobles. The sessions of the Saym became opportunities for endless rhetorics, and it is a matter of record that in 1792 when Poland had already been cut up among its three neighbours, when the only chance of salvation lay in the forthcoming struggle against Russia, the discussion of the reorganization of the army consumed no less than full six months.

But often enough the Polish delegates proceeded from words to deeds, and the Saym of 1764 was pointed to with pride, because no more than a score of people were killed in the course of the parliamentary proceedings. It is a matter of history that no less than twelve diets were broken up before the official opening, because several delegates insisted each on submitting his proposals first, and this method in madness, or perhaps, better, this madness in method, reached its culmination when the law of the so-called *Liberum Veto* was passed, a law which gave every single deputy the right to veto a bill though adopted by all other delegates. All that a deputy, that is, of course, a

Shlakhchitz, had to do to prevent the passing of a law was to arise and exclaim: "*Nie pozwalam*," "I do not permit it," and not only was the particular law not passed but the whole Diet was dissolved in consequence, with the result that for fully two years, until the convocation of the next Diet, the country was in a complete state of anarchy. In the course of 112 years no less than forty-eight diets were dissolved as a result of this *Liberum Veto*. To what extent this canker of lawlessness had eaten into the vitals of Poland may be gathered from the fact that when in 1791, nineteen years after the first partition of Poland, the last Polish king, Stanislav Poniatovski, managed through a clever stratagem to pass through the Diet the famous constitution of the 3d of May, in which the elective monarchy, the *Liberum Veto*, and other similar abuses were abolished, another section of the Shlakhta immediately armed itself against the king and, by invoking the aid of Russia, brought about the second partition of 1793 and the final dissolution of 1795.

Some perhaps may wonder as to the connection between the degeneration of the Shlakhta and the disintegration of parliamentary rule in Poland with the history of the Polish Jews, but I make bold to say that the connection is most vital. We shall later learn to what extent this social process affected the general development of Polish Jewry, but one fact may be anticipated at this point.

If there is anything that is characteristic of Polish Jewry in its earlier stages, it is its extraordinary executive ability and sense of discipline. The former enabled the Polish Jews to fight their economic battles against overwhelming enemies. The latter made it possible for them to evolve an internal Jewish organization which throws into shade any similar attempt made by Jews in modern times, either in this or any other country.

But the Polish Jew lived for several hundred years in close contact with the Shlakhta. He could not help looking upon the Pan as the only guardian of authority and the only representative of government, and if the Polish Jews of today are credited with qualities of a very opposite kind, if, to repeat Brandes's characterization of the Poles, they are found to be "obstinate, combative, and quarrelsome, recognizing no higher law than their own will," if rhetorics seem to take the place of activities, if even the forms of parliamentary procedure are turned into a weapon of anarchy, if the lack of self-restraint, in a word, the spirit of *nie pozwalam*, is still stalking abroad in the councils of Polish Jews, we have no right to regard these failings as being characteristically Jewish, or even characteristically Polish-Jewish, but we have to consider them one of the many excrescences of our Diaspora life, which, to be sure, it must be our duty to cure, but to cure not with clumsiness and violence, but with patient and loving hands.

The Polish Church

To complete the picture of the social organization of Poland, a few words must be said about one more class of Polish society which was of fatal importance in the history of Polish Jewry,—I refer to the Church. As in all other countries, the Polish church, too, while professing that its kingdom is not of this world, managed to dominate this world. The conversion of King Miechyslav to Roman Catholicism in 966 made Poland a tributary of the Roman Curia. The embodiment of discipline, the Church was bound to triumph over a nation whose very soul was the lack of discipline. In wealth, it rivalled the burghers; in political influence it vied with the kings and the Shlakhta, and it gradually succeeded in establishing its power over the minds of all.

The sixteenth century, as in all other aspects of Polish history, marks also a crisis in the history of its Church. The successes of the Reformation, which appealed far more strongly to the independent spirit of the Shlakhta, than the severe discipline of Rome, assumed such alarming proportions that in 1655 the Jesuits were called in to combat it. And the disciples of Loyola triumphed. To be sure, the peculiar condition of the Polish monarchy did not allow the Church to introduce into Poland the monstrous forms of Western European intolerance, but a black cloud of ignorance and super-

stition covered the mental horizon of Poland and kept it in darkness down to the very end of the eighteenth century. Poland fully realized the debt she owed to the Jesuits and paid it promptly one year after the first partition, in 1773,—by expelling them. But the remedy was applied too late. *Finis Poloniæ* was stamped on the forehead of Poland.

Origin of Polish Jewry

We have now reached the point of vantage from which we may observe, at our leisure, the whole panorama of Polish-Jewish history, not as an isolated, and hence unintelligible, phenomenon, but as part and parcel of the general history of the Polish people.

For it may, indeed, be said that in no other country is the history of the Jews so co-extensive, so inextricably interwoven with the history of the surrounding nations as it is in Poland. Already in the early national sagas, centring around the semi-mythical Piast, the organizer of the Poles, the Jews appear as an important factor in the life of the country. For it is a Jew, Abraham Porkhovnik, by name, who, according to legend, was accidentally elected king of Poland, and, with true Jewish sagacity, renounced the thorny Polish crown in favour of the worthier Piast.

Whence these early Jews originally came is a

matter of uncertainty. The conjecture that they emigrated from the lower Danube has not been substantiated; at any rate, this original wave of Jewish immigration was later followed and absorbed by a larger movement from Western Europe, particularly from Germany. Having started towards the end of the twelfth century, as a result of the Crusades, and proceeding on the crest of the general wave of German settlers into Polish lands, it gained constant momentum during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries from the persecutions of the Black Death and the massacres of Armfleisch and Rindleder. The German origin of the Polish Jews is still manifest not only in their characteristically German names, but also in their language, which is essentially the same as they carried it with them in the twelfth century from the shores of the Rhine.

Another huge wave of Jewish immigration poured into Poland at the end of the fifteenth and at the beginning of the sixteenth century from various European countries, whence they were driven either by direct expulsion or indirect persecution, notably from Bohemia, whose immigrants soon became a controlling factor in the life of the Polish Jews. This immigration process may be said to have been completed by the decree of Sigismund II, the last of the Yaguellos, issued by him only a few months before his death, in which, at the request of his Jewish subjects, he allowed the

settlement of Bohemian Jews, yet adding the proviso that no more Jews be permitted to enter Poland.

True, a further movement within the Polish-Jewish population took place in the seventeenth century, when, on the one hand, a number of German Jews fled into Poland from the unrest of the Thirty Years' War, while, on the other hand, the massacres of 1648 drove thousands of Polish Jews into Western Europe. But, on the whole, it may be said that the Polish Jewry of the end of the sixteenth century is the parent of the present Jewry of Russia and Poland, which, by natural increase, has grown to its present numbers, constituting one-half of the whole House of Israel.

The Royal Privileges

The Jewish immigration into Poland was, as we have just seen, due to the negative influence of Jewish persecutions in the countries adjoining Poland. But it was, even to a larger extent, prompted by the positive encouragement which the Jews received at the hands of the Polish rulers. We have now arrived at one of the fundamental forces in Polish-Jewish history.

The Polish kings, infinitely superior, both in capacity and sagacity, to the Polish Shlakhta, endeavoured to graft upon their nation the qualities making for progress, which it so sadly lacked,

and they were, at the same time, anxious to counterbalance the omnipotence of the Shlakhta by promoting the rise of other estates. The same motives which actuated the Polish rulers in encouraging the immigration of Christian tradesmen and handicraftsmen from Germany animated them in favouring the settlement of German Jews, who, in addition, not only brought capital into the land, but also the ability to handle capital.

Apart from these motives, the Polish kings, at least many of them, were actuated by utilitarian reasons of a more personal character. The kings were frequently poor. They had to depend on a treasury, equally poor, and the Jews were ready to pay, and, as we learn from contemporary evidence, did pay, generously and handsomely for every privilege accorded to them. If it be true, as a Polish proverb asserts, that Poland was a gold mine to the newcomers, it is just as true, at least as far as the kings and the Jews are concerned, that the newcomers were a gold mine to Poland. Legend reports that Casimir the Great was prompted in granting his charter of liberties to the Jews by his love for the beautiful Jewess Estherka. The latter fact need not be questioned, for the hatred against Jews has never extended to Jewesses, and Casimir the Great, being a typical Pole, was a particularly fine judge of female beauty. Yet it is certainly far more true, as Casimir himself repeatedly asserts in that same charter, that the Jews were reserved

"for our own interest and the interest of our treasury." It is not accidental that a later king, Casimir IV, in confirming and extending the privileges granted by his predecessors to the Jews was in such straits that he was compelled to pawn the robes and silverware of his queen. And Sigismund II, with a frankness not always to be met with among the diplomatic Poles, declares in a decree of 1539 that the Jews living on the estates of the Shlakhta and paying taxes to them were entirely in the power of their noble landlords. "Similarly," he proceeds, "we do not wish to know anything about the wrongs inflicted on these Jews; for those who offer us no advantages have no right to count on our protection."

However, it is an unprofitable, as well as an uncomfortable occupation, to dig too deeply into the motives of human action. Looking back upon the history of the Jews of Poland, we may gratefully acknowledge that the statesmanship of the Polish kings, if not their tolerance, made Poland a haven of refuge for the Jews; while the rest of Europe, and even the rest of the Polish nation, seemed to have made common cause to destroy them.

The so-called "general privileges" of Polish Jewry, as distinguished from the privileges accorded from time to time to *individual* Jews, are all based upon the charter which was granted in 1264, during the partitional period, by Boleslav

the Pious of Kalish, Duke of Great Poland, to the Jews of his principality, and was, in the following century, confirmed by King Casimir the Great, who extended it to the Jews of the whole kingdom.

The charter of Boleslav and Casimir, the provisions of which were no doubt drafted by the Jews, and were patterned by them after similar privileges obtained by them in some countries of Western Europe, forms the corner-stone of the legal position of Polish Jewry. It was prompted, as is expressly stated in the postscript, by the desire of the king that "the above Jews, whom we have reserved for ourselves and the country, and for our special treasury, may realize during our happy reign that they have found comfort with us." The provisions of the charter are made up of positive rights, insuring the economic progress of the Jews, and of negative privileges, protecting their personal and religious security. To the former belong the freedom of transit, of trade, and of financial operations, which latter pursuit occupies a prominent place in the document. The charter in particular confers upon the Jews the right of receiving all kinds of pledges and also mortgages upon the estates of the nobility. To the latter class belong the numerous provisions securing the personal and religious safety of the Jews.

The Jews are placed under the patronage of the king, they are *servi cameræ*, though in a more delicate form than in Germany. Their jurisdiction

is entrusted into the hands of the Voyevoda and the Starosta, two dignitaries of high rank who were regarded as the personal representatives of the king in the various provinces and towns of Poland. The Jews are exempted from the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical as well as the municipal law courts, both, as we shall see, uncompromisingly hostile to them. They are to be judged by a special officer appointed by the Voyevoda, who, though a Christian, is, on account of his functions, to be designated as the "Jewish Judge." To guard against any miscarriage of justice, only too likely to occur in the case of a Jew, it is provided that the testimony of a Christian against a Jew must be corroborated by a Jewish witness.

The Jew is vouchsafed inviolability of life and limb. Murder and injury inflicted on the Jew are severely punished, just as severely,—this is in one instance expressly stated,—as in the case of a Shlakhchitz. Heavy fines are imposed for invading the house of a Jew or for kidnapping his wife or child. A further clause which is evidently directed against the endeavours of the clergy forbids the annoyance and maltreatment of a Jew who enters a Christian house or visits the municipal baths.

A special paragraph, surprising in its humaneness, imposes a fine on the Christian neighbours of the Jew who refuse to come to his aid when he cries for assistance in the night-time. Particular emphasis is laid, and we shall subsequently see

how greatly this emphasis was needed in Poland and how little it availed, on securing the Jews against the charges of ritual murder or the violation of the host. Such charges, having, as the charter states, been refuted by the authority of the Pope, had no validity unless corroborated by the testimony of four Christians and three Jews, all of them Polish citizens and "unshakable in their faith." The Christian who fails to substantiate these charges is to be punished by death and confiscation.

A number of paragraphs are designed to secure the religious freedom of the Jews. Attacks on Jewish synagogues or cemeteries are heavily punished. The form of the Jewish oath is rendered more dignified and less offensive to Jewish sentiment. The Jew cannot be forced to return his pledges on Sabbaths and holidays; he is allowed to apply his method of slaughtering animals and to sell the ritually unfit meat to the Gentiles.

Finally, a number of paragraphs contain the germ of the vast Polish-Jewish autonomy of subsequent times, with which we shall deal in a later chapter. The "Jewish Judge" appointed by the Voyevoda is bound in his verdict by the approval of the Jewish Elders. He is to sit near the synagogue or in any other place indicated by them. Certain cases may be tried by the Jewish Elders themselves, without the interference of the officials, and the refusal to obey their verdict is punished by severe fines.

Opposition of Polish Estates

This charter of Boleslav and Casimir, which was ratified by almost every subsequent king of Poland down to the very end of the commonwealth represents the maximum of toleration which the Jews were able to secure during the whole of the Middle Ages in Christian Europe, and, it may be added, in many countries of today. But its fate was determined by the fact that it was not a spontaneous gift of the Polish people, which, on the contrary, begrudged the slightest favour shown to the Jews. As a matter of fact, when we examine the provisions of the charter, we find that they already presuppose the existence of forces bitterly opposed to them. They are not so much a charter of privileges as a sort of safe-conduct through an enemy's land. The kings were able to grant liberties to the Jews, but they were not able to grant them liberty. This charter is rather the starting point of a systematic and more or less organized warfare against them on the part of the Polish nation, as represented by its various estates.

This warfare may be said to constitute the sum and substance of the external history of the Jews in Poland,—history, in the dismal connotation of the Jewish Diaspora, that is, history not made by the Jews, but made against them. The belligerents in this struggle are, on the one hand, the Jews supported, more or less effectively, by the kings,

and, on the other, the three estates of Poland, the Allies, if you wish: the Church, the Shlakhta, and the burghers, who fight against the Jews, generally in separate campaigns, occasionally in combined attacks.

The peasants, or khlops, are *hors de combat*, except that the Jews occasionally serve as the lightning-rod of their hatred against their noble oppressors. As for the other estates, their war against the Jews is not a succession of pitched battles or spectacular defeats or triumphs; it is a slow and grinding struggle in the subterranean regions of economic life. It is waged by the unobtrusive method of economic and social restrictions on the part of the Synods of the Church, the Sayms of the Shlakhta, and the municipalities of the burghers, and is only at intervals varied by the more violent contrivance of public riots and charges of ritual murder. It is, to use an illustration now so familiar to us, essentially a siege war. Both enemies are strongly fortified, trenches are taken and retaken, the enemies advance and recede for a few yards; open fighting above ground is varied by secret mining operations under ground, resulting in an occasional explosion; in short, every inch of ground has to be fought for. It would be a difficult, and indeed a useless task to follow this long and uninterrupted warfare in its slow and tortuous zigzag course. The description would be just as tiresome and just as unenlightening as the daily bulletins about some

of the operations in the present war. It will, therefore, be best to sketch this whole process in its broad outlines, confining the description to a few salient incidents.

Polish-Jewish history, like Polish history in general, is divided into two natural halves: the period prior to the end of the Yaguello dynasty, in 1572, when the royal charters and the protection of the kings exercised, if not a controlling, at least a restraining influence; the second period begins after 1572 with the establishment of an elective monarchy, when the royal liberties, though just as frequently given and confirmed, are nothing but a "scrap of paper," which, to be sure, is still to be bought and to be paid for by the Jews, but is in its operation as powerless as is the king himself.

Hostility of the Church

Our analysis of the attitude of the Polish Estates towards the Jews must begin with the Church, not only on account of her power over the minds of individuals, but also on account of the fact that, being controlled by cosmopolitan influences and, therefore, less concerned about the local interests of the country, and being also, in consequence of her enormous wealth, financially far more independent of the Jews than the king and the Estates, she was indefatigable in her efforts to destroy Jews and Judaism. Her attitude toward the Jews is tersely

expressed in the resolution adopted by the Ecclesiastical Synod of 1542, which reads:

> Whereas the Church tolerates the Jews for the sole purpose of reminding us of the torments of the Saviour, their number must not increase under any circumstances.

This gospel of hatred, uttered in the name of one who commanded to love one's enemies, became her inviolable rule of conduct throughout the whole extent of Polish history.

Already in 1266, two years after the promulgation of the charter of Boleslav, and as a protest against it, the Synod of Breslau adopted a number of severe restrictions against the Jews on the plea that

> whereas Poland is a new plantation on the soil of Christianity, it is to be feared that her Christian population will yield more easily to the influence of the superstitions and wicked customs of the Jews living within it.

Hence the Synod strictly prohibits any form of social intercourse between Jews and Christians, an intercourse which was as common in ancient Poland as it was in early Western Europe. To prevent this intercourse the Synod proposes to segregate the Jews in ghettos, and to distinguish them from the surrounding population by a special

head-gear, and by a number of other restrictions of a similarly degrading character.

Of all the canonical prohibitions, the most far-reaching is the one barring Jews from collecting customs, and from occupying other public offices. Similar rules were adopted or confirmed by the later Church councils, one of which (that of Kalish in 1420) goes so far as to force upon the Jews living in the Church districts the payment of a special tax to the Church by way of compensation for having displaced the Christians.

In general, these demands of the Church remained, during the period under consideration, merely *pia desideria*, the realization of which the kings endeavoured to prevent. But in some cases the heavenly power triumphed over earthly royalty. Thus, when Casimir IV, who was greatly in need of money, confirmed the ancient privileges of the Jews, the Archbishop of Cracow threatened him with the torments of hell and compelled him to revoke the charter previously confirmed by him, a fact which was advertised by heralds in all the places of the kingdom and was accompanied by anti-Jewish riots.

It is needless to say that the Church did not neglect the well-tried and never-failing contrivance of ritual murder and host libels, although, as we have seen, they had been made legally inadmissible by the royal charters. In this particular endeavour the Church was readily assisted by the

inhabitants of the towns, the burghers, who had special reasons to fear the Jews. As elsewhere, these charges serve as an index of the intensity with which the Jews were hated. They break out like pus, revealing the progress of the hidden disease.

During the first period, ecclesiastical trials against the Jews, owing to the protection of the kings, did not assume the frequency which characterized them later on. They formed nevertheless an important weapon in the warfare of the Church. In 1399 thirteen Jewish elders of Posen, a city in which the economic struggle between the Jews and Christians was particularly intense, were charged with having stolen and pierced three hosts, from which, of course, blood was miraculously flowing, and they were burned alive on a slow fire. To add insult to injury, the Jews had to pay a yearly tax for having committed the crime, a tax which was levied upon them until the end of the eighteenth century. In 1699 the Christian community of Posen celebrated the tercentenary of this great miracle, and from that time onwards representatives of the Jewish community were made to head the annual procession, while carrying a large picture representing the crime,—an honour from which the Jews freed themselves only in 1724 by a heavy ransom. In 1407 the charge of ritual murder engineered by the clergy led to a terrible riot in Cracow, in which numbers of Jews

were killed and robbed. Jewish pogroms were a not infrequent occurrence. A special feature from the earliest time of Poland was the so-called *Schülergeläuf*, a term coined by the Jews, designating the systematic attacks of young priests, the pupils of the Church colleges, who were employed very much in the same manner as the gangsters of today, not only to assault the Jews but also to force from them, by blackmail, economic concessions.

The advent of the Reformation intensified the hostility of the Church towards the Jews. The success of the liberal doctrines was ascribed to the influence of the Jews, who were even charged with having converted a large number of Christians to Judaism. Literary anti-Semitism of the mediæval "made in Germany" brand raised its venomous voice against the hated tribe. These sentiments found their expression in the resolution of the Synod of 1542, already referred to, beseeching the king to enforce the canonical rules passed on previous occasions: to check the increase of the Jews in the country, to prohibit the building of new synagogues, and to bar the Jews from acting as stewards of the Shlakhta Estates, as well as from exhibiting their goods in public, and other resolutions of the same humane character.

To convince the adherents of the Reformation of the mysteries of the Eucharist, a new host trial was arranged in Sokhachev in 1556, with the help

of a papal nuncio. King Sigismund II, who was sufficiently enlightened to perceive the true motive of the agitation, sent at once an order to stop the trial, but the clergy outwitted the king, and three Jews were burned at the stake prior to the arrival of the royal warrant. It is unnecessary to go into further detail. The facts quoted illustrate sufficiently the attitude of the Polish clergy, which was not a jot better than that of their "brethren in Christ" in Western Europe; with this distinction, however, that its real power in Poland began after 1572, at a time when in Western Europe its power was already on the wane.

Economic Prosperity of Polish Jewry

The struggle between the Jews and the other two estates is mostly of an economic and partly of a social character, though it clothes itself occasionally in an ecclesiastical garb.

To appreciate the issues involved in this particular struggle, we must become clear about the economic position of the Jews in Poland. We have seen above that the Jews were welcomed by the kings primarily as capitalists, and, since capital was especially scarce in Poland, both king and people were even more than elsewhere sadly in need of it. It is natural, therefore, that the Jews became, what they had long become in other countries, money lenders. The bulk of Casimir's

charter consists of paragraphs dealing with this occupation, and from the liberties granted we can infer that money lending was considered to be an absolute necessity for the economic progress of Poland.

But the Jews of Poland were not only possessed of capital, they were capitalists, that is, they were the only ones who, in a country handicapped by the lack of executive ability among its inhabitants, knew how to apply capital. The Jews, therefore, became the financiers or the bankers of Poland. Already in the twelfth century the Jews acted as farmers of the royal mint, and we possess from that century coins on which the names of the Polish kings are stamped in Hebrew characters. In consequence of this financial and executive ability, the Jews became tax farmers, that is, they leased the numerous varieties of public revenue, and they were able, not only to collect them much more efficiently than their Christian fellow-citizens, but also to advance in cash the enormous sums represented by them. The Jews were furthermore frequently employed as the financial agents of the king and the court, thus becoming both the *Geldjuden* and the *Hofjuden*.

Apart from these financial operations, the Jews were busy in opening up the natural resources of Poland. They became the captains of industry, farming the mines, the salt quarries, the timber of the country, as well as managing the estates of the

kings and nobles. Their efficiency may be gauged from the fact that, in spite of all ecclesiastical protests, the Synod of 1643 had to pass a resolution condemning the bishops who employed the Jews as stewards of their estates.

The Jews, engaged in all these pursuits, formed the upper layer of Jewry, whose influence and success may be illustrated by a few examples. Viezhynck, a Jewish merchant of Cracow, of the fourteenth century, presented to the granddaughter of Casimir the Great, as a wedding gift, the sum of one hundred thousand florins in gold, equal to her dowry from her grandfather. Abraham, a Jew of Bohemia of the early sixteenth century, who was recommended to Sigismund I by the King of Bohemia and the Emperor of Germany, farmed the Jewish taxes for the whole of Poland, for a huge sum, which he was able to advance in cash. His contemporary, Yosko (Joseph), occupied, under Alexander Yaguello, a king otherwise unfriendly to the Jews, the post of royal farmer of tolls and customs in nearly half of Poland. Michael Yosefovich, of Brest, in Lithuania, equally of the sixteenth century, was the farmer of the royal revenue in the whole of Lithuania, and acted sometimes as the treasurer of the Grand Duchy, paying the salaries of the officials as well as the creditors of the king. The members of this Jewish *Haute Finance*, which forms a typical element in the composition of Polish Jewry, particularly in its

early period, also enjoyed the personal favour and protection of the king, and considered and conducted themselves as noblemen; in Lithuania they were dubbed the "Shlakhta of Jerusalem."

The middle class of Polish Jewry was made up of merchants, shopkeepers, and traders who carried on domestic and foreign commerce, an avocation to which centuries of practice had inured the Jews. The lowest class was finally made up of handicraftsmen, an occupation which became more and more characteristic of the economic life of Polish Jewry.

Rivalry of the Burghers

In the pursuit of these their economic endeavours, the Jews were bound to clash with the two Polish Estates, the Shlakhta and the burghers. I shall discuss the struggle with the latter first, because it affected the broad masses of Jewry, and was conducted with much greater violence and perseverance than the fight between the Jews and the Shlakhta.

The interests of the burghers and the Jews were conflicting from the very beginning. Both had been encouraged by the early Polish kings to immigrate into Poland and to settle in the towns, and they both engaged in trades and handicrafts. Moreover, these burghers were far more serious opponents than the Poles; they were industrious, they were persistent, and they were well organized

in their magistracies, merchant guilds, and trade-unions, and, in addition, they imported with them the virus of German anti-Semitism.

The success of the Jew was sufficient to whip their latent antagonism into open opposition. For with all their German thrift and industry, which made them so superior to the Poles, they were no match for the Jews. One only has to recall the type of mediæval German shopkeeper so exquisitely portrayed in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, who in his postprandial nap was so forgetful of his business interests that the lady customer in her despair "poked the point of her little shoe into the sleeper and worked it round in him like a gimlet," to realize that still less in his adopted country could he hold his own against the agility and quick-wittedness of the Jew. Moreover, the Jews, through their relations with their co-religionists in other lands, and through an aptitude acquired in the course of centuries, were particularly successful in their foreign commerce, establishing and almost monopolizing the commercial relations with far-off Crimea and Turkey, as well as with nearby Germany and other countries of Western Europe. Finally, being far more inclined than his Christian fellow-citizen to seek the comforts of life in the study and practice of his religion, he was more easily satisfied with the goods of this world. No wonder, then, that the Jews became dangerous and successful opponents.

The fight against these rivals assumes the double form of open violence and silent restriction. Attacks of the mob upon the Jews, generally organized with the ever-ready help of the clergy, became a favourite weapon of war in the large cities. But here the burghers were up against the kings, who energetically intervened against this method of solving economic problems. Thus, when in 1455 a violent pogrom, engineered and conducted by the famous papal nuncio Capistrano, was raging in the capital of Cracow, the king himself, Casimir IV, appeared on the scene and, after stopping the disorders, imposed upon the authorities of the city the heavy fine of thirty thousand gulden. Still more characteristic is the action of Sigismund I, who, in 1530, when anti-Jewish riots were being arranged for in the same city, not only issued a decree threatening the rioters with death and confiscation, but also forced the burghers of Cracow to deposit ten thousand gulden as a pledge that public order would not be disturbed.

More successful proved the silent warfare of restrictions. The Jews in the cities, in accordance with the royal privileges, formed an estate by themselves; they were legally exempt from the operation of the municipal courts and subjected to the jurisdiction of the Voyevoda. Yet the burghers managed, in the course of time, to restrict their right of residence and trade in these cities. To be sure, *de jure* a ghetto was never recognized

in Poland, but *de facto* it gradually came into use. Thus when a fire broke out in Cracow, in 1494, during which the property of the Jews was pillaged by the mob, King John Albrecht, evidently yielding to the desire of the burghers, ordered the Jews to settle in the suburb Casimiezh, which since that time has remained a purely Jewish town.

This tendency became accentuated towards the end of this period, owing partly to the spread of the Reformation and partly to the increased immigration of the Jews from Bohemia and adjoining lands. In 1532 the Jews of Posen were limited to their old quarters and the number of Jewish houses was confined to forty-nine. In smaller cities the Jews were similarly segregated and there were a number of towns which received the special privilege, called *de non-tolerandis Judæis*, of prohibiting the settlement of Jews altogether. Alongside of the restrictions in residence, commercial disabilities were similarly wrested from the king, who often had to yield to the powerful municipalities which occasionally acted in common, as was the case with Posen, Lemberg, and Cracow.

The result of this agitation was the gradual elimination of the Jews from the retail trade and their limitation to wholesale business, which was, in turn, hedged in by all kinds of restrictions. Thus in 1515, the Jews of Lemberg, at the request of the municipality, were ordered by Sigismund I to limit their commercial activities to the sale of

cloth at the fairs, while a few years later (in 1521) they were confined altogether to wax, furs, cloth, and cattle. The Jews of Posen were forbidden, in 1520, to keep shops in the market-place and to buy food and other commodities until the Christians had finished their purchases.

Finally, royal support having proved unavailing, the Jews were forced to open negotiations with the magistracies themselves, and to make arrangements with them, on terms, needless to say, advantageous to the burghers. The earliest agreement of this kind is the one concluded between the Jewish community and the magistracy of Cracow in 1485. Such agreements now became a regular feature, insuring a *modus vivendi* for some time to come. In spite of all these restrictions, the Jews during this period still remained essentially town dwellers. But the limitations imposed upon them by the burghers were inevitably bound to drive them from the cities into the country, a tendency which will assume vast proportions in the following period and will, to a large extent, characterize it.

Enmity of the Shlakhta

The struggle with the burghers affected the Jewish middle class, the tradesmen and artisans. The opposition of the Shlakhta was directed against the upper class of the Jews, the capitalists. The members of the Shlakhta were not disturbed

by the Jewish merchant, for they loathed commerce and forfeited their patent of nobility when they managed to overcome their loathing. But, rich or poor, they were always in need of cash and they had a great deal to do with the Jewish money lender, whom they hated the more the less they were able to dispense with him. Nor were they above the desire of getting hold of the huge profits which they saw flowing into the pockets of the Jewish tax farmer, although they had none of his ability or energy. And, above all, they deeply resented the social position of these Jewish financiers who sometimes controlled the finances of the kingdom and arrogated to themselves the rank of noblemen, and whom they hated with a triple hatred as men of low birth, as members of a detested race, and as professors of an accursed religion.

It is greatly to the credit of the Shlakhta and due largely to that fortunate Polish appreciation of externalities, which we had occasion to point out previously, that their sentiments never assumed the shape of open violence. An old legend, in all likelihood invented in a later period, tells of a Jewish deputation from Germany which came early in the ninth century to the ruler of a Polish province, applying for permission to settle on Polish territory. To their anxious inquiry, "Will you murder us?" the Jews received the reply, "*Polska szlachta nie morduje*" ("Polish gentlemen

do not murder"). To the second inquiry, "Will you rob us?" the answer was given, "*Polska szlachta nie rabuje*" ("Polish gentlemen do not rob"). And, indeed, it must be owned that this has been the attitude of the Polish nobles towards the Jews throughout the ages. But this attitude ought not to blind us as to the real sentiments of the Polish nobility. For these ancient noblemen, who are described in the legend as hating all that is cruel and violent, were the progenitors of the Poles of our own day, who not so long ago were patrolling the streets of their cities to prevent the outbreak of pogroms and who only a few years later did not hesitate to throttle the Jew by a method just as cruel and far more deadly, but perfectly clean and respectable,—the method of the economic boycott.

In accordance with this characteristic, the fight of the Shlakhta against the Jews proceeds along "legitimate" lines, and assumes the form of parliamentary legislation adopted at their diets. Already at the Saym of 1347, during the reign of Casimir the Great, the staunch protector of the Jews, the Shlakhta passed a set of laws restricting their financial operations, and these restrictions were officially justified by "the wicked endeavours of the Jews to destroy the welfare of the Christians." Both the restrictions and the reasons for them, the latter in an even more offensive form, were repeated, with additional limitations, at subsequent diets,—such repetitions being neces-

sary in Poland where life and law were always at loggerheads with one another.

The general recrudescence of anti-Semitism in the sixteenth century also manifested itself in the attitude of the nobility. Having crushed the burghers politically, the Shlakhta was now willing to gratify them by restricting the economic liberty of their Jewish opponents. The culmination of this tendency is found in the constitution of the Saym of 1538, which contains a special section dealing with the Jews.

> We hereby decide and prescribe that from this time onward and for all times, all the farmers of revenues must unconditionally consist of landed nobles and persons professing the Christian faith. . . . We decide for inviolable observance that no Jews be allowed to farm the collections of any form of revenue. For it is undignified and in contradiction with divine right that people of this description should be admitted to honours of any kind or to the discharge of public functions among Christians.

The constitution of 1538 further provides that the Jews shall have no right of unrestricted trading, but shall in every instance carry on their commerce with the special permission of the king or under a special agreement with the municipalities. The trade in the villages is closed to them. The financial operations of the Jews are hedged in by a whole set of restrictions, and, in conclusion,

the constitution reaffirms the ancient regulation of the Church, imposing a special headgear upon the Jews.

This constitution of 1538, which was affirmed again in 1562 and 1565, may be said to sum up the official line of conduct of the Shlakhta in the first period of Polish-Jewish history.

Looking backward at this period as a whole, we find that it opens with a fair promise of Jewish liberty, and that it closes with the menace of economic and social rightlessness, while the interval is characterized by the slow but steady advance of the forces that aim at the destruction of Judaism. If, in spite of all this, Poland shines brightly on the firmament of the Jewish Diaspora, it is because of the intense blackness that covers the other Jewish centres. The protection of the king was, on the whole, a fair safeguard against the violation of life and limb. The strife between the Estates, the laziness of the Shlakhta, and the helplessness of the country, gave the Jews a little breathing space and enabled them to make a livelihood. This was all that the average Jew—I am not speaking of the few exceptions—demanded of his Christian environment. For while his misery was due to his neighbours, his happiness, which was in very truth not of this world, depended on himself, and we shall see in the chapter dealing with the inner life of the Polish Jews that the sixteenth century, with its

growing anti-Jewish sentiment and anti-Jewish legislation, was the classic age not only of Jewish communal organization but also of Jewish spiritual activities.

The Jews of Lithuania

This is the place to insert a few words about the Jews of Lithuania, which down to its amalgamation with Poland in 1569, three years before the end of our period, continued as a separate duchy, in which the position of the Jews was somewhat different from that of the Jews of the Crown, or Poland proper. The origin of Lithuanian Jewry is wrapped in obscurity. According to the current hypothesis, it was made up of two streams of immigration: an older stream flowing through southern Russia from the east and a later one coming from the west. These two elements were gradually blended together, although some far-reaching differences in the mental make-up and even in the physical features of Lithuanian Jews, which may, in part, be due to different origin, have not been obliterated down to this day.

The later introduction of Christianity among the original inhabitants of Lithuania and the adherence to the Greek orthodox faith on the part of the conquered population prevented the Church from gaining her ascendancy as quickly and as thoroughly as in the lands of the Crown. This weakness

of the Church, coupled with the purely agricultural character of the country, secured for the Jews of the Duchy a larger amount of religious tolerance and a greater latitude in their economic pursuits. In the fourteenth century most of the important communities of Lithuania appear to be firmly established. The legal position of the Lithuanian Jews is based on a charter of privileges granted to them by Grand Duke Vitold in 1388, which was similar in content to that of Casimir the Great. The greater religious tolerance of Lithuania favoured still more so than it did in Poland the rise of a class of influential Jews who, as tax farmers and big merchants, attained to considerable wealth and influence. The occupations of the lower classes of the Jews were more varied than in Poland and included down to modern times the pursuit of agriculture.

With the growing *rapprochement* of the two countries the anti-Jewish influences of Poland gradually penetrated into the Duchy. Even the scourge of ritual murder libels was introduced into Lithuania towards the end of this period (in 1562), so that Sigismund II, in his capacity as Grand Duke of Lithuania, was compelled to intervene energetically on behalf of the Jews. The triumph of anti-Semitism is reflected in the so-called second Lithuanian Statute, published in 1566, three years before the amalgamation with Poland, which incorporated the anti-Jewish constitution of the Polish

Diet of 1538. The following restrictions of that Statute may be quoted as an illustration of the position occupied by the Lithuanian Jews prior to that period:

> Jews shall not wear costly clothing nor chains, nor shall their wives wear gold or silver ornaments. The Jews shall not have silver mounting on their sabres and daggers. They shall be distinguished by characteristic clothes, they shall wear yellow caps, and their wives kerchiefs of yellow linen in order that all may be enabled to distinguish Jews from Christians.

Decline of Polish Jewry after 1572

The second period of Polish-Jewish history begins with 1572 and extends until the year 1772, in which, through the first partition of Poland, a compact mass of Jews was brought for the first time under the dominion of Russia. The death of the last Yaguello and the subsequent conversion of Poland into the hybrid form of a republican monarchy sealed the triumph of the centrifugal forces of Poland. With the loosening of royal authority, the Jews lost their principal point of support and became an easy prey to the powers opposed to them. To be sure, the Polish kings, including even the anti-Semitic rulers of the Saxon dynasty, still continued to ratify the ancient Jewish liberties and even to add new ones. But there was no reason in the world why their voice

should have been more listened to in matters affecting the Jews than it was in the general affairs of the kingdom.

The valorous Sobieski, who delivered Vienna from the siege of the Turks, a staunch friend of the Jews, whose memory still lingers among the Jewish people in Poland, was brutally insulted at the Diet because of his interest in the Jews. The last King of the Poles, Stanislav Poniatovski, was elected on condition that he refrain from showing favours to the Jews, although he was not barred from the empty formality of confirming their ancient charter of liberties, a formality which was of little value to the Jews, though it may have been of some monetary value to the king.

As a result, the powers of darkness which we saw timidly raising their heads in the previous period, now stalk about fearlessly in broad daylight. The Church, having triumphed over her enemies within Christianity, now proceeds openly and systematically against the Jews, the enemies outside of it. The Synod of 1733, at a time when in Western Europe new birds began to herald a new season, repeats the mediæval gospel of hatred, preached in 1542, that the reason for the existence of the Jews is

that they might remind us of the tortures of the Saviour, and by their abject and miserable condition might serve as an example of the just chastisement of God inflicted upon the infidels.

The Synod of 1720 forbade the Jews to build new synagogues or even to repair old ones, and the desire, underlying this resolution, was openly voiced by the literary representatives of the Church, who demanded the wholesale expulsion of the Jews from Poland.

Ritual murder trials became the order of the day, and the country in which ritual murder charges were officially forbidden eclipsed during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, by the number and severity of these trials, the rest of Europe. It is typical of the wide gap between theory and practice in Poland that, although the ancient privileges making such charges impossible continued to be confirmed, although as late as in 1578 such charges were branded in a special edict of King Stephen Batory as base slander, no less than thirty ritual murder cases and twenty host trials took place during the seventeenth century alone, and these cases, in open violation of the ancient royal pledges, were no longer tried by the king but by the regular courts which imposed inhuman punishments on the innocent victims. Thus in 1639, to mention one or two illustrations, two elders of the Jewish community of Lenchytza, charged with having murdered a Christian boy, were literally cut to pieces and hung on flag poles on the cross-roads, while the remains of the supposed martyr were exhibited in the local Bernardine Church and proved a lucrative source of income,—showing that

the Church of Poland had greater business capacity than the bulk of her population. In 1753 eleven Jews of Zhitomir were flayed alive on a similar charge, while the picture of the pretended victim, pierced by pins, was sold all over the country to inflame the Poles against the Jews. The attacks of the theological students, the so-called *Schülergeläuf*, now became a permanent scourge in Polish towns, which could be bought off only by the payment of a regular tax to the local theological colleges.

The burghers, freed from the restraint of royalty, now proceeded to square their old accounts with the Jews. In many cities the municipalities forced the Jews, in opposition to their ancient privileges, under the jurisdiction of their courts. They segregated the Jews in separate quarters and restricted in every possible way their freedom of trade and handicraft. When King Vladislav IV had granted the Jews of Cracow, in June, 1642, the express permission to engage in export business, he was forced by the protest of the municipality to withdraw it two months later. This peaceful means of warfare was varied by methods of a more violent kind, for anti-Jewish riots now became a regular feature, and they were no more stayed by the hand of central authority. There is just one feeble ray in this darkness of pogroms, and it may be found in the fact that the Jews were not always the dumb victims of their tormentors. At least,

in Posen, in 1687, the Jews were able, with weapons in their hands, to defend themselves against the rioters for three successive days.

As for the Shlakhta, true to its traditions, it discouraged in its Saym resolutions the use of violent measures, but it countenanced the quiet and far more effective procedure of strangling the Jew by way of economic restriction. The Saym of 1670, in passing various limitations upon the financial operations of the Jews and confirming some of the old ecclesiastical rules, justified its action by the desire "that Jewish perfidy and licentiousness may not gain the upper hand." The Diet of 1768 reaffirmed the old constitution of 1538, making the trade of the Jews dependent on the permission of the magistracies, their mortal enemies. The Diet of 1643 fixed the legitimate maximum of business profits as follows: "Seven per cent. for the Poles, five per cent. for foreigners, and three per cent. for the Jews." And while the commercial liberties of the Jews were thus constantly curtailed, their burden of taxation was more and more increased until it became intolerable. In 1740 the Shlakhta even made the attempt to pass a law whereby the Jews living on the Shlakhta estates were declared the "hereditary subjects" of their noble owners; in other words, were to be turned into serfs, but the proposal was rejected on account of the loss it would entail to the exchequer.

As a result of this coalition of forces, Polish Jewry deteriorated not only politically but also economically, and we shall have occasion to learn afterwards that the deterioration affected no less its spiritual life. No amount of industry, ability, and frugality could save the Jews, who were cornered and helplessly outnumbered by their ruthless enemies. True, here and there we still find a Jewish capitalist of the old type who is able to overcome a world of enemies and makes himself indispensable to the king or the exchequer. But these Jews are no longer a type; they are rare specimens of a fast vanishing species. Jewish trade is burdened with innumerable discriminations and becomes unprofitable. The Jews now rush into the crafts, and organize themselves into separate Jewish trade-unions, soon becoming the bulk of the artisans of the kingdom, as they have practically remained until this day. But owing to the opposition of the Christian trade-unions and their own oversupply of labour, the crafts yield starvation instead of a livelihood. The Jew who had formerly been providing capital to all the classes of Poland now has to seek financial assistance from the same classes; the lender becomes the borrower. This indebtedness to the clergy and the Shlakhta, representing loans contracted not only by individuals but also by communities for communal expenditures and soon running into enormous sums, weighs like a nightmare upon the Jewry of Poland.

The poverty of the Jews of this period may be gauged from a few facts accidentally reported to us. Thus the Jews of Posen, who had formerly occupied the best shops of the town, now had to pawn their synagogue curtain in order to be able to build a fence around their cemetery. In the same formerly rich Jewry the number of weddings was reduced by order of the communal authorities to four annually, and strict injunctions were issued to economize on the wedding feasts. The Jews of Vilna, having ransacked all of their assets to pay a debt to the local priest, were forced with broken hearts to pawn their synagogue lamp. The cities which at the beginning of our period still harboured the bulk of the Jewish population of Poland were evidently resolved to spit out their Jewish inhabitants. Polish Jewry was facing an economic catastrophe. But at this juncture, a new factor entered upon the scene of history: the rise of the landed nobility and the movement of the Jews from the cities into the estates of the Shlakhta.

The Jews under the Dominion of the Great Nobles

The history of Polish Jewry, like the general history of Poland, may thus be conveniently divided into a royal period and a Shlakhta period. If in the preceding period its main support is found in the kings, in the second period it is found

in the Pan. The sixteenth century is marked by the rise of the big nobles who obtain possession of enormous tracts of land, sometimes covering whole provinces, and, amidst the loosening of central authority, assume the rôle of practically independent sovereigns. Poland, to all intents and purposes, is no more a uniform empire. It falls into the condition of a regular *Kleinstaaterei*, being split up into a multitude of territories connected with one another by the loose threads of a powerless royalty. The whole country is now officially divided into the cities and lands standing under the jurisdiction of the Crown and the territories owned and controlled by the Shlakhta. The big landowner, or the Pan, is the undisputed master of his khlops, or serfs, as well as of all others who chose to settle on his estates. He is free from all responsibilities to the Crown, or at least he can easily make himself so if he wishes to.

Now the same reasons which induced the kings in the earlier period to welcome and protect the Jews forced the big Shlakhta during this later period to offer them shelter and assistance. For the Jews were as necessary to the Shlakhta as the Shlakhta was to the Jews. So far as the Jews were concerned, they had become so terribly overcrowded in the royal towns and the restrictions in trade and residence had become so numerous and burdensome, that they were almost mechanically forced to seek their welfare outside of the

towns. The Shlakhta, in turn, were neither able nor willing to cultivate their estates, and they found in the Jews a welcome substitute for their own laziness and incapacity. Polish Jewry is thus split into two sections: the *royal Jews*, that is, the Jews subject to the jurisdiction of the kings, and the *Shlakhta Jews*, subject to the power of the Pans, and this dualism is sanctioned by King Sigismund II, who, in his decree of 1539 already referred to, limits his protection entirely to the Jews of the royal towns, while surrendering the others into the full power of the Shlakhta.

The development and economic stratification of the Shlakhta Jewry runs on a miniature scale through the same stages of development as the royal Jewry of the previous period. The upper layer is made up of those who succeeded in becoming the financial and industrial agents of the great nobles. They handled their financial affairs, colonized their estates, managed their property, opened up and marketed the natural resources of their territories. Practically every Pan had "his" Jew, his "factor," as the term was, or rather his factotum, who rendered every conceivable and inconceivable service to his noble master and enabled him to pursue to the fullest extent what was frequently his sole ambition in life, that of an uninterrupted succession of pleasures and amusements. A famous instance of this type of Shlakhta agent was Saul Katzenellenbogen, the favourite of

the Lithuanian magnate Radziwill who, while gaining enormous wealth for his master, was said to command an annual income of four hundred thousand dollars. He enjoyed, at the same time, immense influence at the Court, was granted the privilege of carrying a sword, and is said to be identical with that mythical Saul Wahl who, according to a wide-spread legend, occupied the Polish throne for one night.

In the towns which now rapidly sprang up on the territory of the Shlakhta, the Jews became the collectors of revenue, despite the official law denying this privilege to them. The Jews also became the shopkeepers and traders of these towns.

The less favoured among the Jews, and these were the vast majority, moved into the villages where they became engaged in a number of rural occupations.

The movement of the Jews into the villages marked a complete economic transformation of Polish Jewry and gave rise to problems, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, stand in the forefront of Jewish economic history during the Russian régime. It is, therefore, necessary to gain a clear insight into the character of this transformation.

The Jews settling in the villages were prevented partly by natural ineptitude, and partly by the miserable condition of the khlops from engaging in agriculture. It was, therefore, natural that they should have preferred to apply their innate

commercial ability to rural life. Hence the Jew became an *arendar*, from the mediæval Latin *arrendare* "to rent," that is, a lessee or tenant who farmed the rural products of the Pan, his mills, distilleries, dairies, fishing, game, and other items of agrarian economy. He also became the keeper of the village inn, or the *karchma*—in Yiddish, *kraychme*—which, primitive as it was, provided the only hotel accommodation in the country. The Englishman William Coxe, who travelled in Poland in 1784, testifies to the fact that on the whole highway between Cracow and Warsaw, extending over 258 English miles, the only places for the reception of travellers were the inns kept by the Jews.

With the keeping of the inns was inseparably associated the sale of liquor. The liquor traffic was the cap- and corner-stone of the whole rural economy of Poland and one of the most important items in the budget of the kingdom. The production of alcohol, owing partly to the wealth of corn, which lack of transportation facilities kept within the country, and partly being due to the intemperance of the population, formed a most important article of revenue for the Pan and the state, in the same way as it has remained until very recently the most valuable item in the state finances of Russia. The right of distilling, or, as it was called by a semi-Latin term, the right of *propinacya*, had been accorded to the landed nobles as far back as 1496. The latter, therefore, were anxious to

promote the consumption of their article to the best of their ability, and their natural and eager customers were their serfs. For the Pan who had full power over his khlops, both *in secularibus* and *in spiritualibus*, did nothing for his serf, except to keep him on the lowest rung of secular and spiritual deterioration. The only privilege left to the khlop was that of starving and dying, and the only spiritual upliftment provided for him —spiritual in a very literal sense of the word—was the permission to get drunk on the spirits turned out by the distilleries of the Pan.

The Jew who farmed all other products of the magnate took over at the same time—and we know of some cases where he was compelled to do so by law—this most important item, the sale of liquor to the peasants. The Jewish innkeeper thus became, by a natural process, the keeper of the tavern where the khlop tried to drown his misery in alcohol. As a result, the tragic anomaly is created,—an anomaly for which the Jew has had to pay dearly not only in Poland but also in Russia down to this day,—that the most sober people on earth is turned, in the interest of the Pan, into the most potent factor of spreading drunkenness among the neighbouring population.

Demoralizing Effect of Shlakhta Rule

The transition of Polish Jewry, or, at least, of a considerable portion of it, from the power of the

kings into that of the Pans, was accompanied not only by its economic deterioration but also by its moral decline, and had not the Jew been saved by his staunch adherence to his religion, this deterioration would have resulted in utter degeneration.

For during the royal period of Polish-Jewish history the influences both friendly and hostile to the Jew, such as the kings, on the one hand, and the Church and the burghers, on the other, were of an impersonal character. They were guided, even in Poland, by impersonal principles, and they could be won over or fought off by impersonal means. During the second period, however, the welfare of the Jews depended entirely on the personal disposition of an unprincipled, or rather non-principled, Shlakhta, whose favour or disfavour could be obtained or averted only by a loss of personal self-respect. The attitude of the Pan toward the Jew was not marked by that systematic and persistent, one might almost say consistent, hatred which was typical of the Church and the burghers. But it was, on the other hand, dictated by a sentiment which was less dangerous perhaps, but infinitely more injurious,—that of boundless, unspeakable contempt.

This contempt, a part of the arrogance with which the Polish nobleman looked down upon the rest of mankind, was accentuated in the case of the Jew by his difference in religion and nationality as well as by his whole conduct of life. The attitude of the Shlakhta toward the Jew is illustrated

by that utterance of Moravski, the Polish Minister of War, whom we shall meet later on, who was horrified by the thought of the noble blood of the Poles mixing with that of the Jews. It is perhaps even more strikingly illustrated by the story still circulated in Poland, which is possibly fiction, but is certainly far truer than fact, of a Polish nobleman, who, after the Polish insurrection of 1863, was fleeing from his Russian pursuers into the house of a Polish Jew. While lying in hiding under the bed, the Shlakhchitz noticed with displeasure that the Jew, who was sheltering him at the risk of his life, was, after the custom of his race, keeping his cap on his head, and, from beneath his hiding-place, he indignantly shouted: "*Psiakrew, żydzie, zdym chapke!*"—"You dog of a Jew, take off your cap!"

The Pan would not think of indulging in systematic persecutions or pogroms against the Jews on his estate; he would, in accordance with the pledges given by the ancient noblemen in the legend, neither murder nor openly rob them, but, following his whim, he would do anything to torture his Jewish subjects and above all to humiliate them.

Contemporary chroniclers tell strange stories of such high-handed actions perpetrated by the Pans against the Jews. Solomon Maimon, a Polish Talmudist and afterwards a famous German philosopher, who had spent his childhood on an

estate belonging to the famous Lithuanian magnate Radziwill, treats us in his autobiography to a choice selection of facts which the wildest flight of imagination could scarcely eclipse. This interesting gentleman who, by the way, was at the same time a high officer of state, entrusted with maintaining law and order, came once into a church in a drunken condition and, going up to the altar, committed there an unspeakable outrage. On the following morning he decided to make amends and he found no better way of doing it than by ordering the Jewish community of the place to present fifty stones of wax to the church as an atonement for his misconduct. On another occasion the same magnate sent for a Jewish barber to bleed him. When the latter arrived, the magnate, who was, of course, drunk, turned the tables on the poor Jew, and with an unsteady hand began to bleed, or rather to butcher, the unfortunate barber, while his retainers were applauding the surgical skill of their master. Maimon's father, when eight years old, had the misfortune of meeting another scion of the same family, who offered him a glass of brandy. When he declined the kindly offer, the Shlakhchitz shouted, "If you don't drink brandy, you shall drink water." Thereupon a pail full of water was brought and the boy was flogged until he had emptied the pail, with the result that his health was permanently undermined. Of another Pan, who occupied at the same time the high rank

of a royal Starosta, the story is told that, having once by accident shot a Jewish *arendar* belonging to his neighbour, he at once made amends by literally packing a wagon full of Jews and sending them to the adjoining estate where they were unloaded like so many bags of potatoes. The same gentleman amused himself by forcing Jewish women to climb trees and to crow like cocks. He would then shower them with bullets and roar at the sight of those falling down, whereupon he would compensate his victims by throwing coins among them.

Having no regard for the Jew's life and limb, the Pan certainly had no respect for his religious susceptibilities. He would occasionally call his Jewish tenant and make him stand on one foot while reciting to him *Ma-yophes*, one of the hymns sung at the Sabbath table, a practice the memory of which has survived down to this day in the expression "Ma-yophes Jew" which is widely applied in Poland to the type of modern Jewish flunkey, a direct descendant of the old Pan-ridden Jew.

We have quoted these examples because they illustrate not only the cruelty of the Pans, but also the aimlessness of their cruelty. It was sheer madness, a madness without a particle of method in it, and the Jew had no means whatsoever to guard himself against it. There was no redress against the noble barbarian, for the only authority to which the Jew could appeal against the Pan

was the Pan himself. The Pan was not an enemy of the well-defined type of the clergyman or burgher, with established policies and idiosyncrasies. He was, as the Jew properly called him, a *Poritz*, from the Hebrew verb *paratz*, "to break the bonds," an unfettered, unrestrained tyrant. Hence, the only way to appease the *Poritz* was to yield, to crouch and cringe, and to accept all indignities with a pleasant smile. One can easily calculate the frightful effects which centuries of dependence on such masters were bound to have on the character of the Polish Jew. We have already had occasion to observe the ruinous effect which the Pan's political unruliness had on the naturally disciplined and self-restrained Polish Jew. But it is no exaggeration to say that whatever faults may attach to the Polish-Jewish character,—faults which the Polish Jew, knowing his worth, can well afford to confess openly,—they are the outgrowth of this dependence on the Pan, who would allow his Jewish *arendar* to live on him and his Jewish "factor" even to thrive on him, but would exact a frightful toll from the Jewish soul for the advantages he would accord to the Jewish body.

The Cossack Persecutions

The description we have just given of the economic and moral changes in Polish Jewry applies,

with a gradual downward tendency, to the whole period extending from 1572, the abolition of the hereditary monarchy, until 1772, the first partition of Poland. Black as this background may seem, there stands out against it a patch of such appalling gloom that in comparison with it all the sufferings ever endured by the Jews, either in Poland or elsewhere, since the great war of the Jewish people against Rome,—unless we except the horrors inflicted upon the Jews during the present war,—fade into insignificance. We refer to the fateful decade of 1648 to 1658, beginning with the Cossack massacres in 1648, the so-called *Guezeroth Tah*, followed by the sufferings caused by the invasion of Poland through the Russians and Swedes. This perhaps blackest of all chapters in the history of the Jewish Dispersion is largely due, at least in its inception, to that ill-mated and ill-fated co-operation between the Jew and the Pan, the effects of which we have just had occasion to describe.

The amalgamation between Poland and Lithuania in 1569 brought the immense south-eastern frontier provinces of the empire, the so-called Ukraïna ("frontier"), comprising the present governments of Chernigov, Poltava, Kharkov, Kiev, and parts of Podolia and Volhynia, into close touch with the central provinces of Poland. The population of these provinces was by race Russian, or, more correctly, Little Russian or Ruthenian;

by religion they belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church. They were, moreover, of a warlike spirit, which had been bred in them by their constant fights against the invasions of the neighbouring Tatars. The most courageous among them had penetrated even farther east and had established a sort of military republic behind the falls of the Dnieper. The members of this republic, who, by the way, had received a considerable admixture of Mongolian blood, were designated as *Cossacks*, a Tataric word signifying "robbers."

At the end of the sixteenth century the territories of the Ukraïna began to be colonized by the Polish magnates. While keeping themselves at a safe distance, they sent their stewards to exploit the Ukraïnians. Among these stewards were many Jews who served as sponges to convey the wealth of the country and the toil of its inhabitants into the pockets of the Pans. They acted as "arendars," in the various functions connected with this term; they were frequently employed as collectors of customs and tolls, in which capacity they exercised a certain amount of jurisdiction over the native population. The treatment of the Ukraïnians was little different from that accorded to their fellow-khlops in the lands of the Crown, but they were of a more independent spirit, and deeply resented the rule of masters, who were not only of a different race, but also endeavoured to lure them by fair, and often by foul, means from

their Greek Orthodox creed into the fold of Roman Catholicism.

At last the exasperated Ukraïnians, led by Bogdan Khmielnitzki, whose infant son is said to have been flogged to death by a Polish noble, managed to ally themselves with their brethren beyond the Dnieper, the Cossacks, and to call to their aid their former enemies, the Tatars, who kept a covetous eye on disintegrating Poland and were only too glad to have a share in the booty. The united hordes of the Ukraïnians, Cossacks, and Tatars had no difficulty in shattering a Polish army sent against them, and the Ukraïnian khlops, freed from their bonds, began an orgy of carnage which knows few parallels in the history of mankind. Every Catholic priest they met was hung up at the high altar, together with a Jew and a dog. Throughout the Ukraïna the Polish nobles, such as were to be found there, were hunted down, burned, blinded, flayed, and sawn asunder.

The fury of the serfs, directed against the Pans, who had tormented them physically, and against the Catholic priests, who had oppressed them spiritually, vented itself with particular vehemence upon the Jews, whom they regarded as the immediate vehicle of their oppression. Led by Bogdan Khmielnitzki and his henchmen, the savage Haidamacks,—or rioters, as they were called in their native dialect,—started a systematic hunt of the Jews throughout the country, begin-

ning with Podolia and Volhynia and penetrating, by way of Galicia and the region of Lublin, as far as the borders of Lithuania and White Russia. Whole communities, numbering thousands of Jews, were wiped out in one day; young and old, men and women, not one escaped from the clutches of these beasts in human shape. In Niemirov (Podolia), the first target of the Haidamacks, six thousand Jews were put to death in one day. In Polonnoye ten thousand, in Narol twelve thousand, and in Bar—all of them either in Volhynia or Podolia—fifteen thousand Jews suffered the same fate. Yet death was kindness in comparison with what preceded it. Our ears, though hardened by the tales of actual or fictitious atrocities on the present battlefields, are incapable of listening to the deeds committed by these savages who called themselves Christians. I say advisedly "Christians," for it is a dreadful truth that the Tatars were a paragon of humaneness in comparison with the Greek Orthodox Cossacks, the ancestors of those of our own day who display similar savagery for the benefit of European civilization.

As for the Jews, needless to say they gloriously justified their reputation for martyrdom, which they had long before acquired in other countries. The Jews of Poland were not quite as easy game as their brethren of Western Europe had been in former days. We have several reports of armed resistance offered by them to their enemies. We

hear of the defence organized by the Jews in conjunction with the Poles, and we are told that the Polish army operating against the Cossacks in the field contained also a Jewish regiment of one thousand men. But in the main the Jew knew better how to die than how to fight, and, encouraged and led by his spiritual guides, he joyfully preferred rack and torture to apostasy, which would have saved him from both.

In Polonnoye, three hundred Jews, clad in their shrouds and prayer-shawls, gathered in the synagogue, and with fervent prayer on their lips, awaited the murderers. In Tulchyn, the Jews exhibited even greater heroism. They had, in conjunction with a few hundred Polish Pans, managed for a long time to defend this fortified town against the besieging Haidamacks, when they suddenly learned that the Pans, in spite of their solemn oath, intended to save their lives by betraying the Jews to their enemies. The Jews proposed to make short work of the Polish traitors, but here arose Rabbi Aaron, the President of the local Talmudic Academy, and reminded them of the danger in which they would place by such an act their brethren throughout the Polish Empire. The Tulchyn Jews, led by the same Rabbi, allowed themselves to be betrayed and butchered to a man. It may perhaps afford some satisfaction to learn that the treacherous Pans did not escape their nemesis. For a new horde of Cossacks speedily

arrived and, chiding them for their treachery, sent them to their fate.

Nor did the women yield in heroism to the men; they surrendered their lives rather than their honour. Many Jewish girls were carried away by the Cossacks and forced into marriage. One of them, while on her way to the wedding ceremony, jumped from a bridge and was drowned; another made the Cossack believe that she knew a charm against bullets, and thus tricked her husband into killing her.

All of these massacres, however, were merely a prelude to further sufferings. Khmielnitzki was finally compelled to stop his outrages, but the Russians came on the heels of the Haidamacks. The barbarism of massacres, a gruesome parallel to contemporaneous events, was followed by the terrorism of the soldiery. In 1654, the eastern part of the Ukraïna, the so-called province of Little Russia, was annexed by the Russian Empire, and, in accordance with its traditions, the few Jews who had survived there were totally expelled. Simultaneously, the Russian army, supported by the Ukraïnians, invaded the provinces of White Russia and Lithuania in the north-east, spreading death and misery among the Jews of the region hitherto spared by the Cossacks. The occupation of the Polish cities by the combined hosts of the Cossacks and Muscovites spelled expulsion to all Jews and death to those who remained behind. Large com-

munities like those of Moghilev, Vitebsk, and particularly the famous community of Vilna ceased for a time to exist.

And while Russia was thus dealing with the north-east of Poland, the Swedes, as if to complete the parallel of today, invaded Poland from the west and penetrated into the very heart of the country, taking one city after the other, including Cracow and Warsaw, and the Polish Jews, to repeat the Biblical simile quoted by an eye-witness, were like the man who "fleeth from before the lion and is met by the bear." It is interesting to note that throughout this period of invasion the Jews exhibited remarkable loyalty to Poland. While the burghers of Lithuania submitted with undisguised satisfaction to the Russian invader, the Jews, together with the Polish nobles, fought for the honour of Poland. In Vitebsk the Jews took a most energetic part in the defence of the city, a fact which was duly reported to the Polish king by six hundred Lithuanian nobles, and a little later the Jews of Brest, although they had become so impoverished that they owned no more than sixteen shops in the city, offered of their own accord to tax themselves heavily for the benefit of the war against the Russian enemy. Yet the mere fact that the Swedes behaved like human beings and treated the Jews as such was sufficient to cast aspersions upon the loyalty of the Jews, and the Polish army operating against the Swedes

now began a campaign of slaughter and persecution against the Jews of Great Poland and Little Poland which laid waste whole communities and brought the Jewish population to the brink of despair. And as if to crown the destruction of man, Heaven poured forth its wrath upon the Jews who became the victims of a terrible plague that broke out after the war.

Effects of the Cossack Persecutions

It is difficult even approximately to estimate the number of Jewish victims who fell during this most gruesome decade. A contemporary writer calculates the number of the slain at 675,000; they certainly amounted to hundreds of thousands and exceeded by far the combined Jewish victims of the Crusades and Black Death. Poland was bent, it would seem, on making up for lost time. Nearly seven hundred communities were destroyed and the material loss was incalculable. The economic condition of the Jews, which, as we have seen, had prior to this time suffered a severe decline, now sank to still lower depths. In the once flourishing Ukraïna only one-tenth of the Jewish population remained, while in the part ceded to Russia Jews for a time disappeared altogether. Polish Jewry was bleeding from a thousand wounds and it seems a miracle that it did not bleed to death.

To us of today it must be of special interest to

know how the sufferings of the Jews in Poland affected the Jews outside of Poland. The response was truly magnificent. An avalanche of Polish Jews, driven by fear of death and baptism, swept all over the countries of the civilized world, not only over Germany, Austria, Moravia, Bohemia, Italy, and Holland, but also over Turkey, Egypt, and North Africa. Everywhere the refugees were offered material help and, what is more, brotherly sympathy. Thousands upon thousands of Jewish captives were carried by the Tatars to the east, particularly to Constantinople and Saloniki where they were ransomed by their fellow Jews at high prices. The town of Texel, in Holland, gave a friendly reception to three thousand Lithuanian Jews. The Jews of Venice spent large sums of money on ransoming their Polish brethren, while the members of the Jewish community of Livorno passed a resolution taxing themselves to contribute twenty-five per cent. of their income towards the relief of the unfortunate. Particularly sympathetic were the Jews of Germany, although they were themselves the poorest of the poor and had just passed through the horrors of the Thirty Years' War. The interest of the European Jews in the Polish relief work was so great that the poor of Palestine were starving in consequence of this neglect, and they had to send a special envoy to remind the European Jews of their needs.

Nor were the Jews outside of Poland left unrewarded for their brotherly kindness. With the stream of Jewish refugees came a wave of spiritual energy which moistened and fructified the soil of the Jews of the Diaspora. Many prominent scholars were soon occupying leading rabbinical positions in the cities of Western Europe. The seeds of Polish-Jewish culture were carried all over Europe and they grew into new plantations. Some historians are inclined to look upon the spread of this culture as a step backward, since it retarded the progress of enlightenment among the Jews. But they have overlooked the fact that the same influence has also stayed the ravages of the so-called Enlightenment. At any rate, the Jews of that time felt most grateful for the spiritual help accorded to them and paid an unstinted tribute of gratitude and admiration to the superiority of the Polish Jews.

As for Polish Jewry itself, those who had undergone the sufferings of that terrible period seemed to think that its rôle had come to an end. But they had underestimated its vitality. Aided by a strong central organization,—an organization with which we shall have to deal later on,—the Polish Jews began gradually to recover from the horrors of destruction and they were soon able to hold their own. To be sure, a cloud had permanently settled upon the mental horizon of Polish Jewry and was from now on fed by the vapours

of the general economic and political disintegration. Yet it still remained a depository of enormous spiritual energies. Polish Jewry still exceeded in numbers all other Jewries of the world and, rightless as the Polish Jews were, they had, after all, more rights than the Jews of Germany who could eke out an existence only by lending money or selling old clothes. The Polish state was, to use the words with which the Diet of 1764 was opened, "like an open house, like a dwelling devastated by storms, like a building without an owner," and the Jew was less disturbed in his search for a few crumbs of bread than he was in the strictly managed and well-kept households of Western Europe. Owing to the appalling growth of political anarchy and the almost incredible economic deterioration accompanying it, the Jews, in spite of all prohibitions, managed to fill the trades and to remain the only standard-bearers of the commercial interests of the country; but withal Polish Jewry was merely the shadow of its former self. It was dragging along wearily until the partition of 1772 sounded the death knell of Poland.

The Polish period of Jewish history ends in a shrill discord. In the pandemonium preceding the dissolution of Poland, the Ukraïnian Haidamacks broke out once more against the Poles and the Jews, and perpetrated countless massacres which culminated in the terrible Jewish butchery

of Uman. In perpetrating these massacres, the Haidamacks were encouraged by the Russians and,—a terrible omen for the future,—a fictitious *ukase* was circulated in the name of Catherine II calling upon the Greek Orthodox to murder the Poles and the Jews. These cruelties marked the entry of the new owner into the ownerless house. Four years later, in 1772, the first partition of Poland was an accomplished fact.

History of Polish Jews after 1772

I shall now, in conclusion, pass in rapid survey the salient facts of Polish-Jewish history after 1772. The first partition of Poland split Polish Jewry into three parts. The Jewry of the province of Posen soon fell under the spell of German culture, and while still manifesting a distinct and vigorous mentality, which singles it out even within the highly cultivated mentality of German Jewry, has been lost forever to its old Polish associations. Galicia fell at first under the misdirected policy of compulsory enlightenment of Joseph II and, though for the last two generations protected and favoured by the benign sway of Francis Joseph, has been kept by the Polish rulers of the land in a state of economic helplessness and spiritual depression.

As for Poland proper, the catastrophe of 1772 seemed at first to bring the nation to its senses. In

a fit of repentance the Polish people began to remedy the evils which had led it to ruin. The Jewish problem could not but force itself on its attention. The investigation of a special committee had brought out the fact that the Jews, who multiplied rapidly, now formed nearly one-eighth of the whole population. They furnished nearly 50% of the artisans of the country and controlled 75% of the exports, but were, in spite, or rather because, of it, in a precarious economic condition. One-twelfth of them were idle and one-sixtieth of them consisted of beggars. Having been cooped up in the towns, a large number of Jews had moved to the land and eked out a miserable existence by selling liquor to the peasants. Instead of attempting to remedy the underlying causes of the evil, the Poles began to sacrifice the interests of the Jews to those of the khlops and the burghers, whom they were now anxious to compensate for past indignities. The Saym of 1768 had already placed the Jews in the towns at the mercy of their competitors and haters, the municipalities. The same policy led to the expulsion of the Jews from Warsaw in 1775 and to the perpetration of a pogrom in the same city, though in a mild Polish form, in 1790.

This attitude towards the Jews, contrasting strangely with the liberal tendencies which had but recently penetrated into Poland from revolutionary France, was now explained and excused by

the complete isolation of the Jews from the surrounding population, that isolation which was the unavoidable result of the whole social structure of the Polish Empire. To be sure, there were noble-minded Poles who wished to include the Jews in the new tendencies of regeneration, and made their voice heard at the national assemblies, but all their projects were conveniently shelved in the parliamentary committees. The famous constitution of the 3d of May, 1791, which was to be the *Magna Charta* of rejuvenated Poland, and removed the ancient evils of the monarchy, such as elective royalty, the *Liberum veto*, the rightlessness of the burghers, and the misery of the khlops, did not contain a single word of cheer for the Jews.

The year 1793 brought the second partition of Poland, which was followed by the popular uprising, led by Kosciuszko. The Jews, though segregated from the rest of the people, offered their sympathy and co-operation to the noble dictator. In Warsaw, during the siege by the Russian army, a regiment of Jewish volunteers was organized by Berek Yoselevich, which covered with their bodies the road on which the army of Suvorov finally entered the Polish capital.

The erection by Napoleon of the Varsovian Duchy, in 1808, marked the introduction of French laws and liberties into the new commonwealth, but it brought no relief for the Jews. While granting liberty and equality to all its citizens,

the Duchy of Warsaw managed to deny them to the Jews by its decree of 1808, which, with true Polish politeness, suspended the operation of the new constitution in favour of the Jews for ten years, until "they have eradicated their peculiar characteristics." The temper of the Ducal Government and the singular make-up of the Polish character are perhaps best shown by the fact that when Berek Yoselevich, the hero of 1795, who had in the meantime continued to fight for Poland, died a warrior's death in 1809, after a series of glorious exploits against the Austrians, he was eulogized in an eloquent oration by the mighty Pototzki, while the profound gratitude of the country expressed itself in the munificent privilege granted to his widow and denied to other Jews,—the right of selling whiskey on one of the principal streets of Warsaw.

In 1813, the government of the Duchy lifted its hand to strike a fatal blow at the economic interests of the Jews by issuing a decree forbidding the sale of liquor by the Jews in the villages, a measure spelling ruin to tens of thousands of Jewish families. Only the dissolution of the Varsovian Duchy averted this danger.

The Congress of Vienna of 1815, which gave its assent to the formation of an autonomous Polish kingdom under the sovereignty of Russia, provided, though in ambiguous diplomatic phraseology, for the emancipation of the Polish Jews. Needless

to say it remained a dead letter, although, in the meantime, there had arisen in Poland, particularly in Warsaw, a class of modernized Jews who were itching to sacrifice their Jewish peculiarities to Polish liberties. On the contrary, the formation of Russian Poland called forth a recrudescence of the anti-Semitic disease, and in 1818 it began to break out in the form of ritual murder charges which, curious to relate, had to be stopped by the mighty word of St. Petersburg.

This anti-Jewish attitude has remained the key-note of Poland until this day, interrupted only by those critical moments when Jewish co-operation seemed more profitable than Jewish hatred. When the insurrection of 1830 broke out the Jews of Warsaw were eager to show their loyalty to their country and to fight for it. They were, at first, roughly rebuffed by Moravski, the Polish Minister of War, who loftily exclaimed: "We shall not allow that the blood of the Jews shall be mixed with the noble blood of the Poles." The Jews were finally permitted to sacrifice their lives, and the type of these patriotic volunteers may be gauged from the fact that, refusing, on religious grounds, to shave their beards, they formed a special regiment of bearded Jews who were dubbed "the beardlings."

The same spirit of patriotism manifested itself on even a larger scale during the insurrection of 1863, when the orthodox Chiefrabbi of Warsaw,

Rabbi Berish Meisels, and the modern preacher, Doctor Marcus Jastrow, went hand in hand with the representatives of the Church in protesting and fighting against Russian tyranny. On the day of the Jewish New Year, the Jews of Warsaw prayed in their synagogues for the success of the Polish cause, and concluded their divine services by singing the Polish national hymn, *Jeszcze Polska nie zginela*, "It is not yet over with Poland." Simultaneously the Revolutionary Government issued a proclamation to the Jews which ended with the following high-sounding promise:

> And it shall come to pass when, with God's help, we shall free our country from the tyranny of Muscovy, we shall enjoy in common the fruits of peace. You and your children shall be in unrestricted possession of all civil rights. For the Government of the People will not inquire into faith and religion, but solely into the place of birth.

The failure of the last great insurrection of Poland robbed the Polish people of the possibility of redeeming their promise. But whether the sentiments expressed in this proclamation have been maintained by the descendants of the heroes of 1863 is a question, the answer to which lies no more within the province of the historian, though it may be supplied from contemporary events.

After decades of cruel and crushing suffering,

the Poles, awakened by the sound of liberty, are encouraged again to sing their hymn *Jeszcze Polska nie zginela.* The Jewish people throughout the world, which has dreamed more fervently of freedom and has tasted more deeply of oppression than any other race, cannot begrudge the gift of liberty to a nation which has always loved liberty, though it may not always have understood it, and which, by the staunch adherence to its traditions and aspirations in the time of adversity, has atoned for many of the errors committed in her days of prosperity.

As for the Jews of Poland, deep down in their hearts there has always lived the feeling that they are part and parcel of the country which they have helped to build up from its foundations, in which they have faithfully shared the joys and sorrows of its prospering and suffering people. But we Jews, being the descendants of the Prophets, believe as firmly in righteousness as we believe in liberty. We know that *tzedoko teromem goy*, "righteousness exalteth a nation," and no amount of political pledges and diplomatic allurements will save the Poles, unless, learning from bitter experience, they will bury their past, with its inequalities and discriminations, and turn over a new leaf on which shall be engraved the ancient ideal of Poland, though in a fuller and happier meaning: *LIBERTY*, *EQUALITY*, and *FRATERNITY.*

CHAPTER II

THE JEWS UNDER THE RUSSIAN RÉGIME

THE history of the Jews of Russia is, as we have now had occasion to learn, the history of the Jews of Poland under the régime of Russia. The death of Polish Jewry as a political entity is the birth of Russian Jewry. Our logical point of departure is, therefore, the year 1772, when the first partition of Poland brought for the first time compact numbers of Jews under the dominion of Russia.

Earlier Phases of Russian-Jewish History

Just by way of introduction I shall rapidly sketch the earlier attempts of the Jews to settle on Russian territory,—attempts that led to no permanent result and are rather of archæological than historical significance. For the early Jewish settlements in Russia have no more connection with present-day Russian Jewry than has the English Jewry of the pre-expulsion period with the modern Jews of England.

Already the earliest beginnings of Russia are

mysteriously interwoven with the destinies of the Jews. For the very dawn of the Russian monarchy is marked by her bitter struggle against the mighty Jewish kingdom of the Khazars, whose capital was situated at the mouth of "Mother Volga," the Rhine of the Russians. A deputation of these Khazar Jews appeared before Prince Vladimir in 986, who, in his search for a new religion, invited the old historic creeds to present their claims. Russian victories forced the Khazars to retire into the Crimea, where they amalgamated with the native Jews who had been settled there from time immemorial—perhaps prior to the Christian Era.

Partly from the Crimea and partly from Byzantium an early Jewish immigration wended its way into the old Russian principality of Kiev. The holy city of Kiev,—which today, though situated in the heart of the Pale of Settlement, is only famous,—or shall I say, infamous?—for its periodic hunts on the Jews illegally residing there,—harboured in the eleventh and twelfth century a prosperous Jewish community which engaged in trading and tax-farming and was noticed favourably by two contemporary Jewish travellers, Benjamin of Tudela and Petahiah of Regensburg. We even observe signs of a spiritual activity, and a certain Moses of Kiev is reported to have been in correspondence with the Gaon Samuel ben Ali of Bagdad.

However, the latent spirit of intolerance fed from Byzantium speedily asserted itself. The early ecclesiastics of the Greek Orthodox Church in Kiev were inflaming the people against the Jews, "the enemies of God," and as far back as 1113 history records a regular pogrom which was perpetrated upon the Jews of that city.

In the fifteenth century we hear of a certain Zechariah, a Jew of the same city, who settled in the Republic of Novgorod, in Northern Russia, at that time already an important commercial centre affiliated with the Hansa League. Zechariah had the fortune, or rather the misfortune, of convincing a few Greek Orthodox priests of the truth of Judaism. The priests came afterwards to Moscow and, favoured by a few exalted personages, began to spread this so-called "Judaizing heresy" in the recently chosen Russian capital. The new doctrine was barbarously uprooted in 1504, but cropped up from time to time, down to the nineteenth century and served as a further deterring influence against the admission of Jews.

We have stray reports of other Jews who managed to penetrate beyond the magic borders of Russia, some of them even becoming the body physicians of Muscovite princes, but all these attempts were sporadic and remained without permanent results.

For already in the sixteenth century the anti-Jewish policy of Russia appears to be well defined.

In 1545, Ivan the Terrible, gave orders to burn in Moscow the goods imported by Jewish merchants from Lithuania, while, in 1550, the same ruler bluntly refused the request of the Polish king, Sigismund II, who was anxious to secure for his Jewish subjects the right of admission into Moscow —on the ground that the Jews imported "poisoned herbs (*i. e.*, medicines) into Russia and lured the Russians away from Christianity." A little later the same inhuman despot manifested his anti-Semitism in a manner worthier of his reputation. When in 1563 he took the Polish city of Polotzk,—a city familiar to American readers through Mary Antin,—he gave orders to drown in the Dvina all Jews refusing baptism. In the treaty concluded in the following century (in 1678) between Russia and Poland, the clause permitting merchants from Poland and Lithuania to enter Moscow contains the fatal words *kromye zhydov* ("except the Jews"), —that gruesome formula which still rests like a blight over Russian-Jewish life.

Peter the Great—the revolutionary on the throne—maintained, in spite of his liberalism, the same anti-Jewish attitude, persistently disregarding the representations made to him on behalf of the Jews during his stay in Holland. His wife and successor, Catherine I, went further, and issued in 1727 a rigorous decree expelling all Jews from the province of Little Russia which had been incorporated in the Russian Empire in 1654 and

into which the Jews, in spite of all prohibitions, had managed to penetrate.

A little later, the Russian Government was at one time inclined to yield to the urgent appeals of several provinces and permit the temporary visits of Jewish merchants. But the conversion of a certain Voznitzin, a captain of the navy, to Judaism, which was the result of his intercourse with the Jewish merchant Borukh Leibov, led not only to the public execution of both culprits, but also to the withdrawal of all previous favours.

The policy guarding the Russian Empire against the contamination of Jews found its definite formulation in the reign of Empress Elizabeth (1741–1762), the daughter of Peter the Great, who managed to combine Greek Orthodox piety in public life with a very questionable morality in her private conduct.

Since, in spite of all legal prohibitions, the Jews, driven by the economic breakdown of Poland, managed to penetrate into Russian territory, the pious Empress issued a decree in 1741 ordering the immediate expulsion "from our entire empire, both from the Great Russian and the Little Russian cities, villages and hamlets, of all Jews, both of the male and female sex, of whatever occupation and calling." The Jews were "henceforward under no circumstances to be admitted into our empire for any purpose, unless any of them shall be ready to accept the Christian faith of the Greek

persuasion; such [Jews], having been baptized, shall be allowed to live in the empire, but shall not be allowed to leave it." When inhabitants of Little Russia, and particularly of the newly annexed province of Livonia, addressed urgent appeals to the Senate pointing to the disastrous economic consequences of shutting off Jewish merchants from the commercial centres of the empire, and the Senate, moved by these representations, begged the Empress to yield, Elizabeth wrote down her famous resolution (December, 1743): "From the enemies of Christ I do not desire any gain or benefit." As a result of this policy, large numbers of Jews—some say as many as 35,000—were driven from their homes, an act of Christian piety, foreshadowing many similar deeds on the part of Orthodox Russia.

The accession of Catherine II, or the Great (1762–96), brought no relief to the Jews. Being personally free not only from religious prejudices but also from religious convictions, an admirer of Voltaire and Diderot, and in turn admired by them, this shrewd German princess who, as she herself boasted, was guided entirely by "circumstances, conjectures, and conjunctures," considered it to her advantage to uphold the brutal anti-Jewish policy of her predecessors. As early as on the fifth day of her reign Catherine II attended a session of the Senate at which the admission of the Jews into Russia was unanimously recommended

to her by the Senators. In spite of her liberal principles, she realized, as she herself frankly informs us in her memoirs, that, having been called to rule over a pious people and to defend the Orthodox faith, having, as we may add, deposed and murdered her husband on the ground of his anti-Russian tendencies, she did not dare to inaugurate her rule by a measure which might expose her to the suspicions of her adopted country. She therefore decided to have the whole question postponed, and when in the same year (1762) she issued a manifesto inviting foreigners to settle in Russia, she added the fateful Russian formula *kromye zhydov* ("except the Jews"). Actuated by the same motive, she denied two years later the repeated applications of the Little Russians for the admission of Jewish merchants into their province, and the only privilege accorded to the Jews was the permission granted in 1769 and for the time being purely academic in character to settle, together with Greeks, Armenians, and Italians, in the empty southern provinces which had recently been annexed under the name of New Russia.

Thus, at the very beginning of our period, we are brought face to face with the fact that, without having as yet any Jews, Russia managed to have a Jewish problem. She had already bound herself by a barbarous policy, shutting the doors of her vast and undeveloped territories to the energy and enterprise of the Jews, and heaping miser-

ies and misfortunes upon the Jewish people which, by the decree of fate, was now to be driven in ever larger numbers under her inhospitable roof.

Contrast between Polish and Russian Régime

In comparing the history of the Jews under the Russian régime with that under the régime of Poland, we are struck by the diametrical difference between the factors controlling them. On the surface, the determining influence in both cases seems to be one and the same: the policy of the rulers. But, while the kings of Poland were the originators of Jewish rights, the Czars of Russia were the founders of Jewish rightlessness. In Poland, the opposition to the Jews comes from below. It rises among the people and pushes its way upwards to the throne. In Russia, the opposition to the Jews originates on the throne and trickles gradually down to the masses of the people. The whole external development of Russian Jewry is one uninterrupted variation upon this sad *leitmotif*,—the hatred of Russian autocracy against Jews and Judaism. It may sink into a tender pianissimo, calling to conversion and assimilation; or it may swell into a thunderous fortissimo, threatening persecutions and massacres, but it always keeps to the same theme: *kromye zhydov* ("except the Jews"), no peace for Jews as long as they are determined to remain Jews.

Hence Russian-Jewish history represents a process far less complex than the history of Polish Jews. The opposition to the Jews is not, as was the case in Poland, thinly spread over a socially heterogeneous population; it is condensed in the personalities of the successive rulers. The Jewish struggle for existence is not the fight against a nation with varied and conflicting interests; it is the constant attempt to escape from beneath the crushing vice of a powerfully centralized autocracy. It is not a contest for big stakes, for power, or for glory; it is a sad and sordid struggle for a little breathing space, for a little elbow-room and, above all, for a piece of bread. It is not a measuring of swords between equal combatants; it is the struggle of the dove writhing in the claws of the vulture. It is not a war waged in the open and followed by victory or defeat; it is an ugly wrangling in the dark against an overwhelming and merciless enemy. It is the kind of struggle foreshadowed in the nocturnal wrestling of the Patriarch Jacob with a mighty opponent. The result has thus far been the same: Israel is wounded but not defeated, and we can only hope that the fight of Russian Jewry against Russian autocracy or rather of Russian autocracy against Russian Jewry will have the same sequel; at the breaking of the day Israel will wrench a blessing from his opponent and, cured by a healing sun, will peacefully proceed on his historic journey.

Anti-Jewish Policy of Czardom

The anti-Jewish policy of Russian Czardom is of a twofold character. It is directed on the one hand against the economic status of the Jews, and, on the other hand, against their spiritual or religious development.

To understand in their full import the principles and methods applied in this policy, we have to recall to our mind the economic and spiritual condition of Polish Jewry at the moment of her transition under the new master. Polish Jewry, which by that time amounted to well over a million, was about equally divided into an urban and a rural population. To begin with the former, the Jews in the towns were principally tradesmen and handicraftsmen. Owing to fierce competition, the result of horrible congestion, the latter again the result of the rapid increase of the Jewish population, the Jews of the towns had been reduced to a state of economic misery and, in spite of their frugality, which was officially attested by a Polish committee of investigation, could do no more than keep body and soul together.

The hostility of the Russian Government to the urban Jewish population manifested itself negatively in shutting off the only possible avenue of relief, viz.: the opening up of the vast and thinly populated regions of Russia to the Jews. Only a short while after the acquisition of Polish ter-

ritory, the Pale of Settlement was officially established, and the rapidly increasing Jewish population became cabined, cribbed, and confined in that gigantic prison. A little later even this limited area was gradually narrowed down by eliminating from it a number of cities distinguished for their military or historical significance as well as a long strip of territory stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea within fifty *vyersts* of the western border of Russia. Still later, the government, not content with this policy of mere negative suppression, proceeded to make the intolerable life of the urban Jews still more intolerable by all kinds of positive disabilities. It seems as if Greek Orthodox Czardom wanted to live up to the mediæval principle that the Jews had only a right to exist in order to remind the Christians of the torments of their Saviour.

As for the rural Jewish population, its mainstay was the Jewish "arendar," or lessee, or tenant, who, as was pointed out in the preceding chapter, was at the same time the innkeeper and liquor dealer. Lest we form exaggerated opinions as to the prosperity of this Jewish exploiter, let me at once state that in most cases he was wretchedly poor,—just as poor, in fact, as the peasant or khlop,—though never as miserable, for, different from this unfortunate serf, he sought comfort in religion, instead of looking for it in the whiskey bottle. The English traveller William Coxe, who

was quoted on a previous occasion, gives the following description of the comforts offered and enjoyed by a Jewish "arendar":

> In these assemblages of huts the only places of reception for travellers were hovels belonging to Jews, totally destitute of furniture and every species of accommodation. We could seldom procure any other room but that in which the family lived; in the article of provision, eggs and milk were our greatest luxuries and could not always be obtained; our only bed was straw thrown upon the ground and we thought ourselves happy when we could procure it clean.

However, the fact that in all his wretchedness the "arendar" was the economic prop of rural Jewry and, therefore, of Polish Jewry in general sufficed to call the mighty Russian autocracy to arms against him.

The official slogan of Russian bureaucracy in its war against rural Jewry was its solicitude for the peasant whose inebrity and economic misery were laid at the door of the Jewish "arendar." For while the Polish Republic had always evinced complete indifference to the fate of her peasantry and, as we have seen at the end of the first chapter, only as late as in 1812, in a fit of repentance, began to search for a scapegoat and found it in the Jew, the Russian Government always manifested, or rather paraded, its affection for the peasant, without, however, at least for a

very long time, doing anything for him. Therefore, instead of perceiving the beam in her own eye: the paralyzing and demoralizing state of serfdom which she allowed to continue undisturbed for the benefit of the still powerful Polish nobility, Russia found it more convenient to behold the mote in the eye of the helpless Jew. In vain was the government reminded by its official committee of investigation in 1812, that the "arendar" was an indispensable factor in the rural economy of the country and that the misery of the peasant was the result of circumstances for which the Jew was not in the least responsible. In vain was it told that the drunkenness of the peasant was due not to the Jew but to the Polish Shlakhta, who continued to enjoy the ancient and extremely lucrative right of *propinacya*, *i. e.*, the right of distilling whiskey, and that the Jew was merely an accidental and, under the circumstances, unavoidable medium of conveying the alcohol of the noble to his serfs. In vain was the attention of the government called to the equally miserable condition of the peasant in the central Russian provinces where the Jew was not allowed to live,—*Tut nichts; der Jude wird verbrannt.* The rural Jew, one of the central pillars of the economic structure of Russian Jewry, is to be destroyed.

Thus, we are confronted by the curious fact that, while the Jews had been driven by the Poles from the towns into the villages, they were now chased

by the Russians from the villages into the towns. The expulsion of the Jews from the countryside is now the devout consummation of Russian autocracy until, after a long succession of experiments, it was finally realized in our own day, spelling ruin and starvation to one-half of Russian Jewry, and by driving the exiles into the overcrowded cities and towns, bringing misery and deterioration to the other half.

The second aim of the Russian policy against the Jews was the shattering, or at least, the weakening of their spiritual and religious position.

While economically Polish Jewry had been inextricably bound up with the general interests of Poland, spiritually it remained an absolutely independent entity. This independence or separateness was not altogether a spontaneous product of inner Jewish development. We shall learn in the following chapter that in the earlier and happier period of Polish-Jewish history, the Jews of Poland were by no means as utterly estranged from their environment as they became afterwards. Their isolation was very largely a part of the social structure of the Polish people. The Jews had been invited and welcomed by the Polish kings as a separate estate and they were kept in this separateness just as carefully as were the other estates. The arrogance of the Shlakhta, which had usurped all the powers of the state, made it impossible for the Jews, just as it made it impos-

sible for all other estates, to exert or even to claim the slightest influence on the general affairs of the country. As for the towns, the municipal autonomy guaranteed to the German burghers by their *Magdeburg Law*, excluded Jews from all participation in the city government and forced them to build up in self-defence an organization of their own, the *Kahal*, or the Jewish Community, with rights similar to those of the Christian municipality. The Polish rulers, as we shall have occasion to see in the next chapter, were zealous in encouraging and maintaining the autonomous character of Polish Jewry, and if the latter, chilled by the icy breath of hatred and contempt, withdrew into their own shell and took advantage of these conditions to establish and to safeguard their religious distinctiveness, it can only redound to their credit.

And no less than their social separateness was the cultural separateness of the Jews in Poland the result of the general status of the country. If the Jews, to mention but two palpable examples, continued to speak their German vernacular, it must be remembered that Polish itself became a national tongue only in a later period of Polish history and that even then it was powerfully rivalled by Latin. Or if the Jews at the beginning of the Russian period were differently attired from the Polish population,this was the result of Polish sumptuary laws which aimed at marking off the Jew from his fellow-citizens, and the unwillingness

with which the Jews gave way to this discrimination may be gauged from the paradoxical fact that down to this day the orthodox Jews of Poland wear the national Polish costume of the fifteenth and sixteenth century which the Poles themselves have discarded for the more modern German form of dress. Thus, the isolation of Polish Jewry, while powerfully instrumental in segregating and consolidating Judaism, was thoroughly in accord with the whole social make-up of the Polish Republic.

The advent of the Russian régime marks a sudden reversal of policy with reference to this inner condition of Polish Jewry. From the very beginning, Russia showed herself implacably opposed to what she officially termed "Jewish separateness," which was in reality tantamount to the preservation of Judaism. The defenders of the Greek Orthodox faith manifested an almost affectionate anxiety for the salvation of Jewish souls, and we have documentary evidence from the time of Alexander I and Nicholas I, showing that nothing short of the conversion of the Jews was the express, though not always the expressed, ambition of the Russian rulers.

From the very inception of our period, the Russian Government is solicitous in breaking down the barriers which guard the entrance to the sanctum of the Jews' inner life. This solicitude expressed itself in an endless variety of measures—sometimes ridiculous in their petti-

ness—tending to transform not only the mental and psychological make-up of the Jew, but also to change his outer self, such as the restriction of the use of Yiddish and the prohibition to wear the Jewish form of dress or the traditional earlocks. The same motive called for the constant limitation and degradation and final annihilation of those insignificant remnants of autonomy which the Jews had managed to save from the Polish *débâcle.*

Prompted by the same desire, the Russian Government attempted by various measures to lure the Jew away from his spiritual moorings by crippling in every possible manner his traditional and highly developed system of education and by forcing upon him Russian civilization,—such as Russian civilization was at that time,—measures which, as the Jews instinctively felt, carried with them the germs of apostasy. That the Russian Government, in pursuing this cultural policy, was not actuated by the desire for legitimate Russification, *i. e.*, for linking the Jew with the general life of the country and making him part and parcel of the great citizenship of Russia, is evidenced by the fact, that when subsequently the Jew shook off his shackles and began spontaneously and eagerly to attach himself to Russian culture and Russian interests, he was brutally halted on his way, and the restrictive educational measures of the Russian legislation of today form one of the saddest features of the Russian Jewish tragedy.

Thus, both economically and spiritually, the attitude of Russia towards the Jew has had but one goal: the ultimate annihilation of Judaism. The tightening of the territorial and economic separateness of the Jew on the one hand and the loosening of his cultural and religious distinctiveness on the other form the two poles of this policy. Their forms of manifestation may be different, varying in accordance with the personal tastes and predilections of the individual rulers, but their character and direction remain one and the same from first to last.

Reign of Catherine the Great

The reign of Catherine the Great, the first Russian sovereign of a compact Jewry, already foreshadows the various aspects of this policy. The first partition of Poland in 1772 brought the 200,000 Jews of the province of White Russia, covering the present governments of Vitebsk and Moghilev, under her sceptre, while the second and third partitions added the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in Lithuania, Volhynia and Podolia. We have already had occasion to observe that Catherine's liberalism did not extend to the Jews. To be more exact, we may add that it exhausted itself in their case in mere phrases and formalities. Thus the opprobrious term *Zhyd* (Jew)—the same word, by the way, does not carry with it the same uncomplimentary connotation in Polish—grad-

ually disappears from the official vocabulary and is replaced by the more respectable word *Yevrey* (Hebrew), with no other result than this that the Russian Jews, whose whole life is edged in by the formula *kromye yevreyev*, no longer suffer as Jews but as Hebrews. The ukases, or decrees, of Catherine and her advisers are garnished with liberal phrases, and one senatorial rescript even goes so far as to point reproachfully to the discriminating character of former Polish legislation against the Jews. As a matter of fact, the reign of Catherine, particularly towards the end of her life when the radical practices of the French Revolution chilled her liberal theories to the freezing point, marks the inauguration of the principal features of the anti-Jewish policies of all subsequent reigns.

The confinement of the Jews within the old Polish provinces engaged the serious attention of the new mistress of the Russian Jews from the beginning. When in 1786, fourteen years after the occupation of White Russia, some of the impoverished Jews begged permission to carry on trade in the city of Riga, their application was refused on the ground that the Imperial decrees did not provide for the settlement of Jews outside the provinces annexed from Poland. When again four years later, a few Jewish merchants from the same province were found to carry on trade in Smolensk and Moscow, the Council of State, yielding to the protests of their Christian competi-

tors, denied the Jews the right of settlement outside the old Polish provinces, with the curious justification that "no advantage can be seen in allowing them to do so." The ukase of June 23, 1794, promulgated after the second partition of Poland, enumerates the Polish territories accessible to the Jews and thus marks the formal initiation of the Pale of Settlement which, with slight variations, has remained the same down to this day, in spite of the fact that its number of Jews has increased manyfold. And as if Catherine had been anxious to ridicule the aspersions cast by her Senate upon the anti-Jewish character of Polish legislation, the very same ukase imposes upon the Jews in the towns the payment of a tax "double the amount of that levied on burghers and merchants of the Christian faith,"—a tax upon a cruel disability.

A rescript issued in the same year (1795) anticipates the subsequent persecution of the rural Jew. For it orders the governors "to make efforts," thus surrendering the Jews into the hands of a capricious and venal officialdom, to transfer the village Jews into the district towns, "so that these people may not wander about but may rather engage in commerce and promote manufactures and handicrafts, thus furthering their own interests as well as the interests of society."

As for the inner life of the Jews, Catherine's policy equally foreshadows the attitude adopted

by her successors. In the official announcement or "Placard," proclaiming the annexation of White Russia, the Russian Government solemnly assured the inhabitants of the province "by the sacred name and promise of the Empress" that their religious liberties, their personal and property rights as well as their estate privileges would remain inviolate. An additional clause provided expressly, though not without a humiliating commentary, for the inclusion of the Jewish societies, *i. e.*, of the Jewish communal organizations, or Kahals, in "this humaneness of her Imperial Majesty." As a result, only a few years later, in 1776, the Kahals were legally acknowledged in their former capacity, not only as religious but also as fiscal and judicial agencies.

Soon, however, the Russian Government forgot its solemn pledges and began to squeeze the Jews, who were deprived of their rights as a separate estate, into the social mould of the urban population. The Jews were granted the right of participating in municipal government, on the one hand, while simultaneously the Kahals were considerably reduced in their functions and were merely retained because it suited the convenience of the Russian exchequer. The municipal privileges, which the Jews under the Polish régime had neither possessed nor claimed, were undoubtedly a step in advance, but they remained a dead letter, owing to the hostile attitude of the Christian townspeople,

while the restrictions imposed upon the Kahals succeeded only too well in weakening and disorganizing the scanty remains of the former citadel of Jewish autonomy.

A striking illustration of the real sentiments harboured by the Russian Government toward the religious beliefs of the bulk of Russian Jewry is the preferential treatment accorded to a small and insignificant section within it. The Karaites of Southern Russia were exempted from all the restrictions imposed upon the Jews and were later on completely equalized with the Christian population. This measure was evidently inspired by the conviction, which afterwards found open expression in the reign of Nicholas I, that the Talmud was a potent and hence objectionable factor in fostering the distinctiveness of the Jews and in shielding them against the danger of assimilation.

Thus, Catherine the Great fully justified the title she was fond of claiming for herself. She was in truth a *commenceuse*, a starter. She laid the foundations of Jewish rightlessness. Succeeding emperors have built upon these foundations.

Reign of Paul

The short reign of her son Paul (1796–1801) is of no importance in the history of Russian Jews, except for the preparations which were made toward the consolidation of the general tendencies of the previous reign.

Prompted by the miserable condition of the peasants in the annexed Polish provinces, the government conceived the shrewd idea of applying for advice to their owners, the Polish nobles, *i. e.*, to the men who had brought about their misery and were now thriving on it. And the Polish Pans, with almost incredible self-complacency, threw the blame upon the poor Jewish "arendar," whose main endeavour had been to enrich them. The result of these investigations was an official "Opinion," composed by the Russian poet Dyerzhavin.

In this "Opinion" the semi-civilized Muscovite, proceeding from the conviction that the Jews were devoid of all moral sense and that they had "no conception of humaneness, unselfishness, and other virtues," proposes, on the one hand, "to curb the greedy pursuits of the Jews," and suggests, on the other hand, to transform their inner life by prohibiting the Jewish language and the Jewish form of dress, by handicapping the extraordinary zeal of the Jews for religious education, and by substituting for their inner Kahal organization an officially controlled machinery. Finally, Dyerzhavin recommends, and it is impossible to suppress a smile when one recollects the primitive stage of Russian culture and thought in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the establishment by the government of a special printing press for the publication of Jewish religious books, "with philo-

sophic annotations." This "Opinion," with its semi-European varnish and semi-Asiatic crudeness, betraying, above all, a phenomenal ignorance of Jews and Judaism, was laid before the Senate in 1800, to serve as a basis for the contemplated codification of Jewish legislation. But the murder of Paul and the sudden accession of Alexander I turned for a moment the political life of Russia into different channels.

Reign of Alexander I

Alexander I (1801–1825) was, to quote his own words, "a happy accident on the throne of the Czars." The disciple of a Swiss revolutionary, endowed with a kindly and even lovable disposition, filled with the ambition to be "the first gentleman of Europe," Alexander did not, however, possess the strength of character and the firmness of purpose to translate his sentiments into action. In his later years, when after the overthrow of Napoleon, he became the acknowledged master of Europe, he renounced his former liberalism and, given over to Christian mysticism and all sorts of superstitious practices, became the most powerful promoter of that unholy combination of forces which, by a curious perversion of history, has been called the Holy Alliance, fettering Europe and Russia in the chains of a terrible reaction. Rising as the morning star of liberty on the sky of Russia,

he descended amidst the black clouds heralding the tempest of despotism which broke over the unhappy land with unprecedented fury under his successor Nicholas.

The Jewish policies of Alexander were destined to pass through the same transition, although they were at no time, not even in the early years of his reign, free from that inveterate prejudice against the Jews, which seems to be inseparable from Russian autocracy.

One of the first actions of Alexander affecting Jewish interests was the appointment, in 1802, of a special "Commission for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews," for the purpose of considering the proposals embodied in Dyerzhavin's "Opinion." When alarming rumours about the tendencies of this Commission began to spread in the Jewish Pale, the governors were instructed to reassure the Jewish population as to the benevolent intentions of the government. An attempt was even made, and a few years afterwards renewed, to permit the participation of Jewish representatives in the elaboration of the proposed scheme, although the attempt, through no fault of the Jews, remained barren of results and was ultimately abandoned.

With the retirement of the reactionary Dyerzhavin from office, the Commission was fortunately enabled to start out on a new and less reactionary path. Within the Commission two currents were

struggling for mastery. The liberal tendency was represented by Speranski, at one time the most powerful adviser of the Czar, a man far in advance of his age, who, already in the beginning of the nineteenth century, cherished the glorious vision of a free constitutional Russia, of which only a faint and distorted reflection struggled into being in the beginning of the twentieth century. The views of this remarkable man, whom Napoleon called "the only clear head in Russia" and to whom the present Russian Duma owes both its name and conception, are incorporated in one of the protocols of the above-mentioned Commission, and they stand out so radiantly against the gloomy background of Russian politics, that their very uniqueness entitles them to a place of honour in the history of Russian Jewry.

Reforms [says Speranski], brought about by the power of the state, are, as a rule, unstable and are particularly untenable in those cases in which that power has to cope with the habits of centuries. Hence it seems both better and safer to lead the Jews towards perfection by throwing open to them the avenues leading to their own happiness, by observing their movements from a distance, and by removing everything that might lead them astray from this path, without using any manner of force, without establishing any special agencies for them, without endeavouring to act as their substitute, but by merely unfolding their own activities. As few restrictions as

possible, as many liberties as possible—these are the simple elements of every social order.

The traditional Russian attitude towards the Jewish problem was championed by the other members of the Commission and their voice prevailed in the end. The report of the Commission, drafted in the conventional spirit of Russian reaction, met with the approval of the Czar, and found its embodiment shortly thereafter in the "Statute Concerning the Welfare of the Jews" which, issued on December 4, 1804, determined for a whole generation the legal position of the Jews of Russia.

The Statute of 1804

The Statute of 1804, which has been dubbed the "Jewish Constitution" of Russia, aims, in accordance with the general Russian policy, at the economic and cultural transformation of Russian Jewry. The cultural rejuvenation of the Russian Jews, which, reflecting the predilections of Alexander, is placed at the head of the Statute in a special section "on Education," was to be brought about by granting them full access to Russian educational institutions, from public school up to university, or by allowing them to open their own secular schools in which one of the three languages—Russian, Polish, or German—was to form a compulsory subject of instruction. A knowledge of one

of these languages was, within a few years, to be required of the Rabbis as well as of Jews occupying public office either in the Jewish Kahal or in the non-Jewish municipality. At the same time the use of Hebrew and Yiddish was to be excluded from all public and communal documents; in addition, the Jews who were elected members of the municipalities were to abandon their traditional Jewish costume in favour of the Polish, Russian, or German form of dress.

The economic transformation of Jewry was to be attained by the grant of a number of privileges to Jews who would take up agriculture in the sparsely populated provinces of Southern Russia. Simultaneously the present pursuits of the Jews, in particular the liquor traffic, were discountenanced. Needless to say, the limitations of the Pale of Settlement were reaffirmed. Measures of a more radical character were projected against the Jews in the villages: they were to be entirely removed from their places of residence.

While the privileges granted in this Statute, which ran counter not only to the noble principles of Speranski, but also to the deeply implanted traditions and habits of the Russian Jews, were more or less problematical and, in any event, merely scratched the surface of the Jewish question, the restrictions of the Statute tending to suppress the present economic occupations of the Jews were fraught with palpable realities and reached

into the very heart of Jewish life. The most important provision of the Statute of 1804 is undoubtedly Clause 34, which categorically forbids, after the lapse of a period of four years, the residence of Jews in villages and all the rural occupations connected with it. This measure threatened with expulsion and starvation nearly one-half of Russian Jewry, and it soon became evident that no less than half a million Jews were involved in the impending calamity. No wonder then that the Jews who could scarcely appreciate the endeavours of the Russian Government to foist upon them a foreign culture, a culture inferior to their own, saw only the hand lifted to deliver a crushing blow. As the time set for the execution of the measure,—the beginning of 1808—was approaching, a cry of despair went up from the unfortunate victims, accompanied by shouts of protest from many of the landed proprietors for whom the sudden removal of the Jews from their estates involved serious economic injury. The voice of Jewish misery and of ordinary common sense would have scarcely been heeded by the Russian Government, had it not been seconded by the grave political complications which soon drew Russia into the whirlpool of contemporary European history.

Changes of Policy

The conduct of the Russian autocracy during the varying phases of the great European conflict

reveals so luridly the cat and mouse attitude of Czardom, that it deserves to be told in detail and to be studied with particular attention at the present centenary repetition of those great events.

It was in the latter part of 1807, just about the time when the term set for the expulsion of the Jews from the villages was drawing nigh, that Napoleon, who had just crushed the power of Prussia and was now moving towards the borders of Russia, convoked the Jewish Sanhedrin in Paris. This step was viewed by Russia—a view shared by the Government of Austria—as a device of the shrewd Corsican to win over the compact Jewish masses of the two empires. A special circular was sent out to the governors of the Pale of Settlement ordering the suppression of any possible contact between the Jews of Russia and their co-religionists of France. As a means of arousing the distrust of the orthodox masses of Russian Jewry,—the same masses whom the Statute of 1804 wished to lure into the fold of enlightenment and, through it, into the bosom of the Greek Orthodox Church,—the governors were shrewdly instructed to spread among them the notion that the French Sanhedrin was favouring Jewish Reform and was harbouring dangerous designs against traditional Judaism. It is characteristic of Russian astuteness that simultaneously the Holy Synod issued a proclamation in which it warned the Greek Orthodox Russians against

Napoleon, because he had convoked this very same Sanhedrin and intended to overthrow Christianity with the help of the Jews, who were about to proclaim him their Messiah.

Yielding to the representations of the Minister of the Interior, who pointed to the political risk involved in the execution of a measure which might arouse the Jewish population against the government, Alexander decided to postpone the expulsion. He appointed a new commission to consider, in the light of the military exigencies, the advisability of carrying out the expulsion demanded by the Statute. At the same time he issued a rescript to the Jews, couched in terms, reminding us in their affectionate phraseology of the mythical ordinance of our own days addressed by the Czar to his "dear Jews." "Prompted by the desire to furnish our subjects among the Jewish people with an additional proof of our solicitude for their welfare," the Czar invited the opinions of the Jewish communities, or Kahals, as to the most convenient way of carrying into effect the provisions of the Statute.

The Jewish Communities did not fail to respond to the invitation. Of course, they all agreed on the perniciousness of the proposed expulsion and pointed out the difficulties in connection with the suggested cultural reforms of Jewish life. By the time, however, the Jewish replies had reached the capital, the political constellation had under-

gone a radical change. The Peace of Tilsit had been signed and Alexander fell under the spell of the great personality of the Corsican. Political complications were no longer to be feared, and on the 19th of October, 1807, the Czar issued an ukase in which, utterly forgetful of his solicitude for the welfare of his Jewish subjects, he demanded peremptorily the expulsion of the Jews, "without the slightest delay and mitigation."

The expulsion began. Thousands of Jews were bodily evicted from their villages and driven, under military convoy, into the towns where they were left on the open streets. The catastrophe assumed such appalling proportions that the governors themselves began to bombard the authorities of St. Petersburg with petitions to stop the further execution of the barbarous measure. The Czar was forced to yield and the Jews were allowed to remain in their former seats until further notice.

A new commission was appointed to find out ways and means for diverting the Jews from the rural liquor trade to more productive forms of labour. After three years of work, the commission submitted, in May, 1812, a report in which truth and common sense at last raised their voice. Some of the conclusions of this commission have been anticipated in the beginning of this chapter. The report gave a true estimate of the causes responsible for the misery and drunkenness of the peasant as well as a correct appreciation of the real

position of the Jewish "arendar." It depicted the poverty of the Jewish tavern-keeper, who only worked for the pocket of the Pan. It pointed out that the removal of the Jewish liquor dealer would only result in his being replaced by a Christian saloon-keeper of a more obnoxious type. It demonstrated the impossibility of a sudden elimination of the Jews from an occupation which had provided them with a livelihood for centuries. It finally urged the inexpediency of still further exasperating the already exasperated Jewish population, "in view of the present political circumstances."

The political argument once more carried the day. The fatal 34th clause, though not officially repealed, was allowed to die a natural death,—not without a subsequent attempt by the same ruler to resuscitate it, under changed conditions. For Napoleon's hosts were just then marching upon Russia, invading her through the provinces of the Pale of Settlement populated with solid masses of Jews.

Loyalty of Jews during the War of 1812

During the great struggle of 1812, the Russian Jews evinced throughout a remarkable spirit of loyalty and patriotic devotion. This spirit manifested itself in important reconnoitring services rendered by the Jewish civilian population,—the Jews were not yet drafted into the army,—and it showed itself equally in popular circulars written

in Yiddish calling upon the Jews to pray for the success of the Russian arms. This outburst of patriotism on the part of a population which had always been the cinderella of the empire may be accounted for by a variety of circumstances. The suspension of the expulsion from the villages, decreed three years previously, was in all likelihood taken by the Jews as a happy augury for the future benevolent plans of the government. Moreover, the Jewish masses of Russia, clinging tenaciously to their isolated mode of life, were apprehensive, an apprehension which was voiced by a famous rabbi of the time,—and, if I am rightly informed, is determining the attitude of many Russian Jews in the present struggle,—that the victory of Napoleon, while favourable to the Jews from the material point of view, might carry with it the germs of religious disintegration, such as could then be witnessed in Germany. In any event, the loyalty of the Jews stood in strange contrast to the attitude of the so-called native population, the Poles, who unmistakably sympathized with the invader, although it would seem that the Jews, in contradistinction to the modern Poles, were not yet diplomatic enough or not yet civilized enough, to turn informers against their fellow-citizens.

This patriotic attitude of the Jews excited the surprise and admiration of the Russian authorities. In Grodno, where the Polish officials were suspected of disloyalty, the police administration had

to be entrusted into the hands of the Jewish Kahal. Even the imperial Jew baiter, Nicholas, who as Grand Duke was travelling shortly after the war through the invaded provinces, could not help paying his homage to the unselfish and often heroic exploits of the Jews, although in the same breath he could not refrain from designating them as leeches sucking the blood of the country. Czar Alexander himself knew, and feelingly spoke, of the patriotism of his Jewish subjects and on several occasions promised to alleviate their lot.

It seemed at first as if the Czar actually intended to redeem his pledges. The cause of the Jews was entrusted into the hands of Count Golitzin, the new Minister of Spiritual Affairs, a man benevolently disposed towards the Jews, although, as came out soon afterwards, he was far more interested in effecting their spiritual salvation than alleviating their bodily sufferings. In 1817, a decree was published prohibiting ritual murder trials in the empire which, at that time, began to crop up in various parts of the Pale. The government even went so far as to invite an Advisory Council of prominent Jews to help in the solution of the Jewish problem.

Conversionist Endeavours

But all these budding hopes were speedily nipped by the night frost of reaction which settled after 1815 over Russia and Europe, that reaction of

which the Czar himself was the most powerful promoter. Carried away by a wave of Christian mysticism, he soon forgot his promise to relieve the material distress of the Jews and, aided by his Minister Golitzin, the president of the missionary Bible Society, conceived the plan of capturing their souls instead.

In 1817, an ukase was promulgated which was a clear manifestation of this traditional longing of Russian autocracy for the souls of the Jews. The ukase called for the establishment of a "Society of Israelitish Christians" to assist those Jews who, "having convinced themselves of the truths of Christianity," were ready "to join the flock of the Good Shepherd and the Saviour of Souls." This society, which was placed under the immediate patronage of the emperor, was to assist Jewish apostates by the grant of free lands and the bestowal of a goodly number of other attractive privileges. The imperial decree which was, as it openly avowed, inspired by "reverence for the blessed voice which calleth unto the flock of Israel from their dispersion to join the faith of Christ," was evidently meant as a bait to lure the vast masses of Russian Jewry into the fold of the Church. But it resulted in utter failure. The government had set aside a huge tract of land for the expected rush of neophytes and appointed a whole staff of officials to take care of them, but both land and officials remained idle, and the

society, after lingering on hopelessly for a number of years, was finally disbanded, in 1835, by his successor Nicholas.

The failure of the imperial pet scheme did not improve Alexander's sentiments towards his Jewish subjects. But the edge of his disappointment was soon to be painfully sharpened by the success of an apostasy of a diametrically opposite kind, the conversion of thousands of his Russian subjects to Judaism. In the same year in which the Czar issued his ukase calling the Jews into the bosom of the Church, he received a petition from a number of peasants in the government of Voronyezh, a province outside of the Pale of Settlement, applying for permission to practice freely the "Mosaic Law." It was a resuscitation of the dreaded "Judaizing Heresy" of yore which now began rapidly to spread over vast regions of Central Russia and became gradually consolidated in the sect of the Subbotniki or Sabbatharians. The ruling circles which were just at that time filled with evangelic zeal on behalf of the Jews were shocked by the sight of Christians turning to Judaism. Draconian measures were speedily adopted and the heresy was finally stamped out, but not until thousands of sectarians had been banished to Siberia and a vast number of villages turned into a wilderness. It may be of interest to add that some of the sectarians fled to Palestine where they still live and work as loyal Jews.

The "Judaizing Heresy" could not well be charged to the Jews, since they were excluded from those provinces, which fact did not prevent the government from instructing, with its accustomed shrewdness, the Russian officials to inspire repugnance to the new sect by calling it a *Zhydovskaya sekta*. Yet indirectly the success of this pro-Jewish heresy, coupled with the failure of his pro-Christian policy, irritated the emperor and led to a recrudescence of anti-Jewish legislation.

Effects of Reaction

The new spirit of reaction manifested itself in the attempt to revive the old devout consummation of Russian autocracy, the expulsion of the Jews from the villages. In consequence of the outbreak of one of the periodic famines in White Russia, the emperor issued, in 1823, a rigorous decree expelling all Jews from the villages of that whole province. The decree was carried out with ruthless severity. Over 20,000 Jews were driven into the congested towns where many of them, owing to the lack of accommodation, lay about in the streets during the winter, perishing from cold, hunger, and disease. The expulsion, as was pointed out on a previous occasion, was ostensibly prompted by the solicitude of the government for the welfare of the peasants. To what extent this aim was accomplished, may be gathered from a report of the Council of State written twelve years

later (in 1835) in which the expulsion from White Russia was characterized as having ruined the Jews, "though it cannot in the least be observed that the condition of the peasants has improved thereby."

A further ukase of 1824 forbade the residence of foreign Jews, particularly those of Austria, on Russian territory, while in the following year the Jews, residing in villages within fifty *vyerst* of the western frontiers, were banished from their places. The ultimate aim of all these persecutions—this admission was openly made in an official document of the following reign—was the desire of Alexander "to decrease altogether the number of Jews in the empire."

Such was the reign of the kind-hearted and liberal-minded Alexander. It bore all the earmarks of Czardom, and, though it started in hope, it ended in despair, and served as a fitting prelude to the horrors that were to follow.

Reign of Nicholas I

If Alexander claimed to be a "happy accident on the throne of the Czars," his brother and successor, Nicholas I (1825–1855), was the very embodiment of the methods and ideals of Russian autocracy. Nicholas was wont to consider himself the providential guardian of legitimacy and autocracy against the liberal encroachments of the "rotten West," and he was ready to help others in

fighting for the same cause, to serve, as he actually did serve, as the "gendarme of Europe." This mission Nicholas I, very different from his gentle and wavering brother, carried out with an energy and vigour which rightly won for him the title of the "Iron Czar." His mind, to quote the characterization of Queen Victoria, "was an uncivilized one and so were his methods." His reign was initiated by quelling in blood the uprising of the liberal Dyekabrists ("Decembrists," from *December*, the date of Nicholas's accession), and was maintained by a barbarous soldiery and a frenzied police which ruthlessly suppressed the slightest manifestation of free speech or thought. Nicholas's régime fettered for nearly a generation the mighty giant of the north, who was allowed to stretch his limbs for a brief moment only under his successor, Alexander II.

There is no need to say that the Jews more than any other portion of his subjects were apt to feel his iron hand. For from the very beginning Nicholas was full of hatred and prejudice against them. Already in 1816, while still Grand Duke, he designated, as we have seen, the Jews of White Russia, in accordance with the hackneyed notions of Russian bureaucracy, as the leeches of the country, and in the very first year of his reign he took occasion to affirm his belief in the hideous ritual-murder libel. No wonder then that his reign stands out with particular blackness on the black

background of Russian Czardom and forms one of the saddest pages in the sad annals of Jewish martyrdom.

The general policies against the Jews had already been dictated to him by the traditions of autocracy. They were, as we have seen, the contraction of the economic and territorial latitude of the Jew and the relaxation of his religious and national distinctiveness. But it must be acknowledged that in the execution of these policies Nicholas I displayed an energy and originality, which accords him a place of distinction in the far-stretching gallery of Jewish oppressors.

Ritual-Murder Trials

It may have been an accident, but it certainly formed a proper setting for Nicholas's reign, that both its inception and its conclusion were equally marked by a ritual-murder trial. The initiatory case, one of the most celebrated and most hideous specimens of this human aberration, goes back in its beginnings to the preceding reign. In 1823, a Christian boy of Velizh, a town in the government of Vitebsk, disappeared on the first day of the Christian Easter and was afterwards found dead in a neighbouring swamp. The principal champion of the blood accusation was a depraved and immoral woman, Terentyeva by name. The Gubernatorial Court of Vitebsk dismissed the case by acquitting the accused local Jews and

administering a warning to the wayward Terentyeva. But, bribed and inspired by local Christian fanatics, Terentyeva remained active. Taking advantage of the visit of Alexander I to Velizh, she managed to hand him a petition, asking him to re-open the case and falsely declaring that the murdered boy was her own son. Alexander I, disregarding, with his usual inconsistency, his edict of 1817 which prohibited the prosecution of ritual-murder charges, complied with the request of the prostitute. The result was the impeachment of forty-two prominent Jews and the fabrication of an enormous cobweb of lies which was presented to Nicholas, who had in the meantime ascended the Russian throne, as a proof of the pernicious doctrines and practices of the hated Jews. The new ruler, in commenting upon the report submitted to him, openly expressed his belief in the existence of this bloody rite among the Jews and gave orders to close the synagogues of the Velizh community which he evidently regarded as the seats of religious cannibalism (August 16, 1826).

The further prosecution, however, assumed such fantastic dimensions that Nicholas himself became somewhat shaken and ordered a new investigation. After passing through numerous vicissitudes and law courts, the case finally reached the Council of State, and ended in 1835 in the triumphant acquittal of the accused and the indictment of the

accusers. In ratifying the decision of the Council of State, Nicholas reiterated his belief in ritual murder, with the modification that not the whole body of Jews, but rather a sect among them were guilty of that practice,—a loop-hole which has enabled many an up-to-date Haman to harmonize his modernism with his mediævalism. He consequently refused to comply with the suggestion of the Council to republish the edict of his predecessor, making such trials impossible.

The ritual-murder case of Saratov, which marked the end of Nicholas's reign, was less complicated. This time the customary charge was made against the handful of Jews who lived in that central Russian town. As a result, Nicholas ordered, towards the end of his reign (in 1854), the appointment of a committee which was not only to investigate this particular crime, but also "to inquire into the dogmas of Jewish religious fanaticism." The supposed perpetrator of the murder, a certain Yushkevich, was, in 1860, in the reign of Alexander II, sentenced to banishment for life, but was pardoned by him in 1867, at the request of Crémieux, then president of the Alliance Israelite Universelle.

Economic Repression

Returning to the more permanent policies of Czar Nicholas, we may conveniently divide them, in accordance with our scheme, into the measures directed against the economic welfare

of the Jews and those aimed at their spiritual extermination.

The economic policy of restriction ran in the accustomed groove of Russian autocracy. The inviolability of Russian territory against the penetration of the Jews was emphatically reaffirmed. When, in 1835, the Council of State considered the proposal of admitting Jewish merchants of the first guild to the interior of Russia, the Czar put down the laconic resolution: "This question was already decided by Peter the Great. I dare not alter it." The Czar was as good as his word, for the obstreperous Jews, who were caught outside the Pale, were exiled to Siberia or drafted as penal recruits into the army.

On the other hand, the previous tendency of contracting the area of the Pale of Settlement was pursued farther. The cities of Kiev, Sebastopol, and Nicholayev were closed to the Jews. The provinces of Courland and Livonia were forbidden to all Jews not born there. The decree of Alexander I, expelling the Jews from the villages situated within the fifty *vyerst* border zone, was extended, in 1843, to the cities within the same area, although the measure could not be carried out, as it threatened to lay waste entire regions.

Also the old consummation of Czardom, the annihilation of the rural Jew, made a step in advance by the exile, in 1835, of all the Jews from the villages of the governments of Grodno and Kiev.

The banishment of the Jews from the villages of the remaining governments was only checked by the representations of the Council of State which, referring to the expulsion from White Russia in 1823, pointed out the uselessness of this measure, since, having ruined the Jews, it had not brought the slightest relief to the peasants.

The rigour with which Nicholas endeavoured to preserve the autocratic heirloom of Jew-baiting attracted the attention of Western Europe. During his stay in London, Nicholas was approached by English Jews, bespeaking his mercy on behalf of his Jewish subjects. A similar motive led afterwards, in 1846, the noble Moses Montefiore into the den of the lion. Montefiore, who was personally recommended to the Czar by Queen Victoria, was received with all the courtesies in which the Russian diplomats are such past-masters, but his mission led to nothing.

On the contrary, Nicholas extended the policy of economic repression to the Jews in the towns. The "Temporary Rules concerning the Classification of Jews," which were adopted by the Czar, in spite of the energetic protests of a few noble-minded dignitaries, were intended to set apart a special class of "unsettled burghers," comprising those tens of thousands of Jews who, owing to the policy of territorial contraction, pursued by that very same government, had been unable to find a settled occupation. This new class of Jews was

to be subjected to increased restriction and oppression. The execution of this terrible measure, which struck terror into the hearts of innumerable Jews, was fortunately interrupted by the outbreak of the Crimean War and, later on, by the death of the Czar.

Militarism as Agency of Conversion

Truly original, however, Emperor Nicholas was in carrying out the spiritual aspect of the autocratic policy against the Jews. The gentle methods of his predecessor did not appeal to the Iron Czar. The Russian Bible Society, presided over by Count Golitzin, was disbanded, as was the Society of Israelitish Christians, on which his brother had built such great hopes. The Czar believed in discipline and he, who had never put on civilian clothes since the day he entered active military service in his early youth, naturally thought first and foremost of the army as a most effective means of drawing, and, if necessary, of dragging, the recalcitrant Jews into the fold of Christianity.

Up till then, the Jews had not performed active military service, but were, like the Russian merchant class in general, held to pay large sums of money in lieu thereof. We can vividly realize what the service in Nicholas's army, with its ferocious discipline and its inhuman duration of a quarter of a century, meant to the strictly ortho-

dox and completely isolated Jews of Russia. What the Jews feared, viz., the de-Judaizing effect of such a protracted military service in a Christian environment, fascinated Nicholas, and the drafting of Jews into the army was speediiy decided upon.

But this was not enough. The highly developed state of Jewish education had resulted in accelerating the maturity of the Jewish youths who, at the early age of eighteen,—the year of conscription,—were proof against proselytizing influences. Hence the iron hand of the Czar had to strike at the tender age of the Jew. The Jews were to be drafted into the army, not at the age of eighteen, as in the case of the Christian population, but at the age of twelve, although the twenty-five years of service were to be counted only from the eighteenth year. These six years of impressionable adolescent life were to be spent by the Jewish youth, far away from the Pale of Settlement, in military establishments called Canteens, or Cantons,—hence the name of Cantonists applied to these Jewish lads,—where they were to be prepared for the army and—this, of course, was not openly said though clearly intended—for the Church. Each Jewish community was to be made collectively responsible for the supply of a certain quota of Jewish recruits.

Characteristic of the spirit of the whole measure are the details prescribed for the administration of the oath of allegiance to the recruits. This

ceremony was to take place in the synagogue before the open Ark and was to consist of a long and gruesome formula to be recited amidst burning candles and the blowing of the "Shofar" (the ram's horn), while the recruit was wrapped in his prayer-shawl and phylacteries. Evidently it demanded great solemnity to force allegiance of this kind upon the Jewish victims of this unique method of conscription.

This plan, which was obviously ready in the mind of Nicholas in the very beginning of his reign, was carried out soon afterwards, without awaiting the customary reports of the official experts. The ukase was signed on August 26, 1827.

The conscription ukase descended upon the Jews of Russia with the effect of a stunning blow. The wildest flight of imagination had not foreseen such a catastrophe. It seems that the authorities were prepared for Jewish resistance, but the Jews under Russian rule had been only too effectively cowed into submission. History records but one solitary case of protest which took place in a small Volhynian town (in Old Constantine) and manifested itself with proverbial Jewish gentleness. A petition, complaining against the Czar of Russia, was duly executed and put into the hands of a dead member of the community who was about to be buried, in order to present it before the throne of the Almighty. This typical Jewish mutiny might easily have led to serious results, for it became

known to the authorities of St. Petersburg, and the Czar had given strict orders to have all such cases tried before courts-martial.

Inhumanly hard as the measure was, it was not as hard as its manner of execution. It affected not only the victims but the whole social and moral structure of Russian Jewry. It was but natural that at the promulgation of the measure the poor Jewish lads, liable to this kind of military galley service, should have tried to evade it. They began to disappear and to hide wherever they could, concealing themselves in the woods and in caves. Since, however, the Jewish communities were collectively forced to supply a definite quota of recruits, they had to resort to violent measures to make up the shortage. They appointed special agents called "catchers," or, in Yiddish, "khappers," who went about, literally kidnapping Jewish recruits. The "khappers" were not, and perhaps could not be, very fastidious. To fill the quota, they often kidnapped children below the prescribed age of twelve, sometimes seizing youngsters of eight, stating an older age when submitting them to the authorities. They often took them away, nay, literally tore them away, from the arms of their mothers, leaving behind them howling or speechless misery. This terrible conscription had a most demoralizing effect upon the whole public life of the Jewish community. It bred, among other evils, the disease of denunciation (or *mesira*)

which for a long time ate like a canker into the vitals of Russian Jewry.

As for the victims themselves, no imagination, not even that of the Jew acquainted with the sufferings of his people in the past, can adequately picture the horrors that awaited the so-called Cantonists. Immediately on being drafted, or rather kidnapped, the recruits were placed in a gaol where they were kept until the official conscription. Thereupon they were loaded like sheep on a wagon and dispatched to their points of destination, mostly in the outlying provinces of the empire where they were to spend thirty or sometimes forty years. Most of the little ones, and many of the older ones, died on the road. Those who arrived at their points of destination were placed in the Canteens and at once taken in hand for the purpose of inducing them to baptism. No cruelty was cruel enough to bring about this result. Flogging was one of the mildest preparations for the adoption of Christianity. The tender children were denied sleep and kept on their knees until they perceived the truth of the Christian doctrine of love as interpreted by the Russians. Others were denied food or, conversely, were forced to eat highly seasoned food and denied drink afterwards. Many of the children, particularly the very young ones, gave way under these inhuman sufferings. But the older lads—those who had already drunk from the fountain of Jewish tradi-

tion—became martyrs to their faith,—a martyrdom of children unequalled in Jewish or in general history. A popular legend tells of a solemn ceremony when all the Jewish Cantonists were drawn up in a line on the banks of a river and prepared to take their baptism in it. Following the word of command, they jumped into the river, but none rose to the surface. They had sacrificed their lives on the altar of faith.

The Jewish young men who, being of a maturer age, became soldiers at once, without first going to the Canteens, were safe against the allurements of baptism, but their ordeal was no less heavy. And when they finally passed it, many distinguishing themselves in battle, the first recognition paid to them was to drive them back into the Pale. Only during the following reign were the so-called "Nicholas soldiers" reluctantly permitted to live outside the Pale.

Enlightenment as Agency of Conversion

It seems, however, that for one short moment the rays of European enlightenment strayed into darkest Russia and conjured up before the Czar's mind the vision of a Jewish conversion accomplished by more gentle and yet more effective means. This diversion was due to the influence of a few liberal men in the environment of Nicholas, notably of Uvarov, the Minister of Public Instruction, a man kindly disposed towards the Jews,—perhaps too

kindly, for he, too, was one of those who like the Jews best when they have ceased to be Jews.

Only a few years previously, in 1835, the rights of the Jews, or rather their lack of rights, had again been codified in a new "Statute," even harsher than the Statute of 1804 in its policy of economic and spiritual repression. Five years had passed and the reports of the Russian officials, who were evidently of the opinion that an imperial ukase was strong enough to undo the development of 3000 years, indicated that no change of heart had taken place among the Jews who, in their wickedness, remained as loyal as ever to their superstitions. The Council of State, therefore, while considering, in 1840, the theoretic foundations of the Jewish problem, struck at the novel idea of imitating the de-Judaizing methods of Western Europe and decided to break up the isolation of the Jews by educational and cultural measures, the latter to be followed, in case of failure, by the abolition of Jewish autonomy, of which only a few shreds had survived, and finally to be crowned by radical economic suppression.

On December 27, 1840, a special commission was appointed bearing the characteristic title: "Commission for Finding Ways and Means for the Radical Transformation of the Jews of Russia." The soul of the Commission was the Minister of Public Instruction, Uvarov, who, in his report on the subject, declared that his plan aimed—al-

though, as he cautiously added, this aim was to be kept secret—at the suppression of the Talmud and the purification of the religious beliefs of the Jews, adding significantly that the religion of the Cross was "the purest symbol of universal citizenship." His plan consisted in opening in all the cities of the Pale elementary and secondary schools for teaching secular subjects as well as for instruction in the Jewish religion, "according to Holy Writ." These institutions were gradually to supersede the existing Jewish schools which taught the perverted doctrines of the Talmud.

In order to secure the co-operation of the Jews, or rather to ward off their opposition, Dr. Max Lilienthal, who had established a modern Jewish model school in Riga, was invited to act as the propagandist of the government. In carrying out his task, Dr. Lilienthal met with a certain amount of encouragement from the few Jews already modernized or longing for modernization, but found himself face to face with the stubborn opposition of the conservative bulk of the Jews who plainly asserted that the government's hidden purpose was to lead them to the baptismal font. These Jews were somewhat pacified by the solemn assurance of Dr. Lilienthal that he would immediately abandon his post if he found the supposition to be correct.

In 1844, the Czar issued two decrees, one to be made public, calling for the establishment of a net-

work of Jewish elementary schools as well as of two rabbinical seminaries. Another, confidential, decree instructed the authorities how to handle these schools, advising them that "the aim of the education of the Jews consisted in bringing them nearer to the Christian population and in eradicating the prejudices inspired by the Talmud."

In the following year Lilienthal suddenly left Russia, and went to the United States. Needless to say, he had fathomed the designs of Russian autocracy.

Among the measures directed towards the spiritual uplift of the Jews was also the old petty contrivance of Czardom: the restriction or prohibition of Jewish dress. In 1844, an impost of five rubles ($2.50) was levied on Jews who insisted on wearing their traditional skullcap or *yarmolka*. An imperial ukase of 1851 prohibited male Jews to wear the old Jewish costume or to retain the traditional ear-locks, while a separate ukase, issued in the following year, forbade Russian-Jewish women to follow the old Jewish custom of shaving their heads on entering into marriage. The governors and governor-generals of the Russian provinces had nothing more important to do than to watch over the execution of this truly hair-splitting bit of Muscovite tyranny. Jews were caught in the streets and forcibly deprived of their ear-locks. Jewish women were examined and the barbers attending them as well as the rabbis

present at their weddings were summoned to court. In spite of all these measures, the opposition of the Jewish mass prevailed in the end against the whims of the Czar, and the law became a dead letter.

These "educational" measures did not interfere with the application of more palpable methods of suppression. Many of the territorial and economic restrictions referred to above were passed during this period of official enlightenment. In 1844, the Jewish Kahals, the last vestiges of Jewish autonomy left from the Polish inheritance, were abolished. Characteristically enough the only Jewish communal officials who were allowed to survive were the "conscription elders," who bore the responsibility for the supply of recruits, and the Jewish tax collectors, since to the old Jewish meat revenue, the so-called *korobka*, was now added the new impost on Sabbath candles to provide for the educational experiments of the government.

Culmination of Anti-Jewish Policy

But the true genius of Nicholas lay, as we saw, in the domain of militarism, and we are not surprised to find that towards the end of his reign he reverted to this pet scheme of his youth.

The inhuman conditions attaching to conscription had made the Jews dread military service to such an extent that many resorted to self-mutila-

tion. As a consequence, the shortage in recruits was considerable. Several decrees, one more cruel than the other, dealt with this Jewish anti-militarism. One of these decrees prescribed that the shortage was to be filled by men of every age, including fathers of families, and the "conscription elders" themselves were liable to be drafted into service, so that they had no other alternative than to become, as a contemporary tersely puts it, either murderers or martyrs.

But the most devilish piece of legislation is probably the ukase of 1853, giving every Jew permission to capture any one of his coreligionists who might be found without a passport and to present him to the government as a substitute either for himself or for a member of his family, or to sell him to another Jew who might be in need of such a substitute. As a result, many a Jew, outside of the official "catchers," was tempted into becoming a kidnapper. Bands of Jewish gangsters sprang into being who prowled about the inns for the purpose of robbing Jewish travellers of their passports in order that they might afterwards capture them for substitutes. Of all the horrors of that most horrible contrivance of Czardom, the Jews felt most burningly this fiendish stratagem to sully the soul of the Jew and to turn him into an accomplice of the misdeeds of Russian autocracy.

Fortunately, there is an end to everything. The despotism of the Iron Czar, who was turning mil-

lions of human beings into lifeless and soulless machines, tottered under the crashing blows which the forces of the "rotten West," allied in the Crimean War, were dealing out to it. Nicholas I, who on his death-bed seemed to realize the failure of his policies, was superseded by Alexander II, whose reign was fraught with beautiful promises —alas with promises only—for the suffering and despairing Jewry of Russia.

Reign of Alexander II

The accession of the Czar-Liberator marks a new era in the history of Russia. Czardom had overreached itself. The Russian collapse in the Crimean War in which the Orthodox empire was fighting against the "rotten West" had luridly revealed its own rottenness, and Russian autocracy had to beat a retreat. This retreat was happily facilitated by the personal disposition of the new ruler who strongly resembled his namesake Alexander I, and had been educated by the poet Zhukovski, the masterly interpreter of western classics to his countrymen. The abolition of serfdom, the creation of a modern judicial system, the grant of rural self-government, and other great reforms followed one another in quick succession. However, as in the case of Catherine the Great and Alexander I, the end of the liberal reign was a betrayal of its beginning. The Czar-Liberator, as if to prove the stubbornness of Russian autocracy, stopped short of

liberating his people. He had loosened its chains, but he refused to remove them, and the Russian giant, tantalized by half-measures, brandished his fetters and felled the man who had loosened them.

In the case of the Jews, too, Alexander only loosened their chains but failed to remove them. His era was, and still is, looked upon as the Golden Age of Russian Jewry, but, when analysed closely, its only claim to this title is found to consist in the pitch-dark background of the preceding and the following reign. In reality, Alexander II maintained, though in a more modern disguise, the traditional anti-Jewish policy of the Czars. He was the Czar-Liberator of the Jews only in so far as he abolished the juvenile conscription, that fiendish masterpiece of Muscovite tyranny, which had no place in rejuvenated Russia. On the other hand, he persistently refused to grant them liberty, and even the few liberties he finally decided on granting them had to be wrenched from him by his more liberal-minded advisers.

Policy of Amalgamation

When, in 1858, his attention was called to the barbarous injustice of expelling the discharged Jewish soldiers from the places outside the Pale where for twenty-five and more years they had served their country, he declared that he was "energetically opposed" to the idea of allowing Jews to reside outside the Pale. Only nine years

later was this primitive piece of justice ultimately wrested from him. His personal view of the Jewish problem is expressed in his injunction to the newly appointed "Jewish Commission," instructing it to revise the existing Jewish legislation "with a view to harmonizing it with the general tendency leading to the amalgamation of this people with the native inhabitants, as far as the moral condition of the Jews permits it." This "amalgamation," *i. e.*, not the inclusion of the Jews in the general citizenship of the country, but the surrender of their national and religious distinctiveness, was only a modern translation of the policy of conversion which his father Nicholas had endeavoured to bring about by brutal, and his uncle Alexander I, by gentle means. The educational policy of Alexander II, as applied to the Jews, was prompted entirely by this motive, and the economic and political liberties granted by him, liberties which only benefited a thin layer on the surface of Russian Jewry, were avowedly the result of this desire for "Jewish amalgamation."

Proceeding on the lines of the educational policy, marked out by his predecessor under the influence of Uvarov, Alexander II decreed in 1855, shortly after his accession, that after the lapse of twenty years only such Jewish rabbis and teachers were to be appointed to these offices who had received their training in the official rabbinical seminaries or in some other secular institution. In 1856, a

strict government supervision was established over the *Heders* (elementary Jewish schools) and the *Melameds* (elementary Jewish teachers), these measures being intended to crush out the "pernicious influence of the Talmud." Even the petty warfare against the traditional Jewish *kaftan* (a long robe) and Jewish ear-locks was not forgotten. For after they had offended the eyes of the Czar on one of his visits to Poland, they were cut by the Russian officials with greater energy than ever, as if the only misfortune of Russia was the survival of the Jewish "Peies."

Alexander's economic legislation with reference to the Jews was, as indicated above, marked by the same policy of amalgamation. It followed on the heels of a report of the "Jewish Commission," which pointed out to the Czar that the amalgamation of the Jews was hampered by their terrible disabilities. We have already seen that Alexander was watching with the same superstitious awe over the Jewish Pale, as his predecessors had done. But as an allurement to amalgamation, it was decided to single out a few categories among the Jews for the purpose of opening to them the forbidden interior of the empire. After several years of discussion and investigation, this privilege was finally accorded to merchants of the first guild, to graduates of a Russian university, and to mechanics affiliated with trade-unions.

It may appear strange that the doors of the

congested Pale should have been opened just to those privileged classes of Jews who suffered least from that congestion, but it becomes clear to us in the light of the general utilitarian attitude of the Russian Government towards the Jewish problem. In addition to the motive of selecting only such Jews as were already amalgamated or liable to amalgamation, the government was actuated, as was afterwards boldly betrayed by two liberal-minded dignitaries, not by the wish to benefit the Jews, but by the desire to introduce Jewish capital and Jewish energy into the semi-civilized central provinces of the empire.

If we except the abolition of juvenile military conscription, we find that the liberalism of this celebrated Golden Age exhausted itself in the permission granted to a limited number of Jews to escape from the Pale and in a few more privileges, such as the admission to the bar and participation in rural self-government, which, though valuable in themselves, affected but an insignificant number of Jewish individuals.

Anti-Jewish Reaction

But even this modicum of liberty proved too much for the government and was repented of almost as soon as granted. The latter part of Alexander's reign is marked by a general reaction in its attitude towards Russian emancipation as

a whole and by a double reaction in its attitude towards the emancipation of Jews.

The policy of amalgamation pursued by the government had not proved without effect, but the effect was in exact proportion to the cause. The government had accorded privileges to the "few," and the "few" were, indeed, seized by a frenzy of amalgamation which led in many cases to a complete detachment from Judaism. The "many," however, the compact Jewish masses gasping for breath in the congested Pale, hungry and rightless, were as loyal to Judaism as ever, and found their only solace and inspiration in it. They were distrustful of the rabbis and teachers manufactured and hall-marked by a government whose main purpose was to lure, or to drive, the Jews away from Judaism. The decrees of 1855 and 1856, aiming at the elimination of the traditional type of Jewish teacher and leader, had led to no result and had to be repealed. In 1873, the special Jewish schools which had been organized with such aplomb under Nicholas I were closed, only a few survivals testifying to the ambitious plan of the preceding reign. On the other hand, the admission of privileged Jews beyond the Pale had proved only *too* successful, for the native merchants of the interior began to clamor against Jewish exploitation, the synonym for Jewish competition in the vocabulary of Czardom.

All this served as welcome nourishment for the

powers of darkness which were again raising their head. Numerous signs heralded the approach of the reaction. An unprincipled Jewish convert, Jacob Brafman by name, who managed to find access to the Czar, began to accuse the Jews of all mortal crimes. He asserted that the Jewish Kahal organization, officially abolished by Nicholas in 1844, continued to exist and to pursue a dangerous anti-Russian policy, in conjunction with the Jewish communities throughout the world headed by the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Paris. His work (*The Book of the Kahal*, 1861), containing all these libels, was sent out to all the government offices of the empire for rule and guidance. A few years later, a former catholic priest, named Lutostanski, who had been unfrocked for immoral conduct, began to charge the Jews with ritual murder and other horrible misdeeds. His book, containing these charges, was not only received by the heir-apparent, the later Czar Alexander III, but was also sent out to the secret police all over the country. An anti-Jewish riot took place in Odessa in 1871. A ritual-murder trial was engineered in Kutais in the Caucasus in 1878. The "Novoye Vremya," which had till then championed the liberal tendencies of the "New Time," suddenly changed front and became, as it has remained ever since, the sewer of Russian anti-Semitism. A special commission appointed by the Czar in 1871 was entrusted with the task of "weakening as far

as possible the social ties of the Jews," *i. e.*, of breaking down the unity, and, with it, the vitality of Judaism. Ominous clouds were gathering on the horizon, and when on March 13, 1881, Alexander II fell a victim to his policy of half-measures, there broke out a terrific storm which has been raging ever since over the heads of Russian Jewry.

Recent Times

The reign of Alexander III (1881–1892) lies outside the range of a historic survey, and a description of it is both unnecessary and impossible. Unnecessary, because it is indelibly stamped on the minds of the contemporaries. Impossible, because only the genius of a Dante could furnish a worthy sequel to his "Divine Comedy," by picturing the "ungodly tragedy" of the Jews in the inferno of the Czars. Only a few facts may be added to complete the picture of the history of the Jews under Russian autocracy.

Alexander's policy towards the Jews follows the traditional lines of his predecessors, aiming at the extermination of Judaism. But in its methods of execution his reign presents several noteworthy departures. Having arrived at the conclusion, already foreshadowed in the preceding reign, that the "goal of Jewish amalgamation is unattainable," *i. e.*, that the Jews were not ready to sell their birthright for a mess of lentils, Alexander at one stroke discarded all attempts to draw the Jews

into the Orthodox Church by the gentle strings of enlightenment. Hence the doors of the educational institutions of Russia are shut with a bang in the face of the Jew. The annihilation of Judaism demands more tangible methods of warfare. Hence the addition of the word *pogrom* to the twentieth-century dictionary of Europe. The vice of the Pale of Settlement must be tightened to the crushing point. Hence the "Temporary Rules of the 3d of May." The old consummation of Czardom, the destruction of the rural Jew, is at last an accomplished fact. Pobyedonostzev becomes the brain and Plehve becomes the hand of frenzied autocracy. A third of Russian Jewry is doomed to immigration, another third condemned to starvation, and the last third is to be saved by conversion.

Nicholas II is the worthy son and successor of his father. While reaching out for the title of Prince of Peace, he wages war to the knife against his Jewish subjects. The primitive riots at the close of the nineteenth century fade into insignificance before the well-organized butcheries at the beginning of the twentieth. The "Temporary Rules" are declared in permanence. Jewish rightlessness is spun out into a gigantic cobweb to insure the destruction of the victim.

However, Czardom seems again to have overreached itself. The "rotten West," whether it be through the deafening roar of its cannon or

through the still small voice of its diplomacy, is openly shattering, or secretly undermining, the citadel of barbarism. The cobweb of autocracy, instead of catching the fly, has only entangled the spider. Already the wind of liberty is stirring, and the time is near when one whiff will suffice to sweep the cobweb and the spider into the abyss of oblivion.

The history of the Jews of Russia is the history of the Jews under the Czars. It is not the history of the Jews under the Russian nation or amidst the Russian nation. We have no quarrel with the great Russian people. We do not hold it responsible for our sufferings. Many of them, forgetting their own wrongs, have time and again uttered passionate words of protest against the wrongs inflicted upon the Jews. The Russian people is itself the victim of autocracy, and only from ignorance and shortsightedness does it occasionally become a tool of autocracy.

As for ourselves, we need not despair. In looking backward upon the war waged against Jews and Judaism by Czardom as an institution and by the individual Czars as its instruments, we derive comfort and consolation from the Divine Promise of Jewish indestructibility which we confidently recite on our annual feast of liberty:

> For not one only among them stood up against us to destroy us, but in every single generation did they stand up against us to destroy us. Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, saveth us from their hands.

CHAPTER III

THE INNER DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSO-POLISH JEWRY

THE student of Jewish history, who, wearied by the uninspiring vicissitudes of the external life of the Jew, turns away to enter the sanctum of his spiritual existence, cannot but experience a spark of that sublime relief which was felt by the great Jewish lawgiver when after his wearisome wanderings in the desert he suddenly beheld the Divine presence in the midst of a thorn-bush. We, too, have been wandering through the dreary wilderness of external Jewish history in the lands of the Slavs. We saw the buds of Jewish hope parched by the heat of hatred or swept away by the storms of persecution. We beheld Israel as an unattractive thorn-bush, dry, leafless, and prickly, a true product of the desert. But suddenly our disappointment is turned into enchantment. For a Divine fire is seen bursting from the unsightly plant, wondrously transfiguring its graceless forms, and a mysterious voice is heard calling: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

Characteristics of Polish Judaism

If the spiritual history of the Jew in the Diaspora is holy ground, because it represents the triumph of the few over the many, of the weak over the strong, of the spirit over the flesh, it is doubly holy ground in the case of Russo-Polish Jewry. For it is in Poland and Russia that the culture of Diaspora Judaism has found its most perfect manifestation.

Unfortunately this Polish-Jewish culture is but seldom appreciated, not because, as is the case with so many historic phenomena, it is too distant from us, but, on the contrary, because it still is too near to us. Many of us and, with us, the majority of the Jewish people are a product of that culture. What we are and what we are not we owe equally to its influence, and with that unfortunate capacity for fault finding which a later and inferior phase of that very culture has bred in us we only think of what we are not, and are ready to condemn the presumable source of our failings. But when we have once divested ourselves of our personal sympathies and antipathies, we are forced to the conclusion that Polish-Jewish culture, or, in short, Polish Judaism is the culmination and perfection of that form of Judaism which thus far has been the only one to stand the test of the Dispersion, the Judaism of the Rabbis, or rather the Judaism of the Bible as interpreted by the Rabbis.

Polish Judaism is the worthy successor of Talmudic Judaism. Were it possible for the ancient sages of Palestine and Babylonia to join hands, across the chasm of time and space, with the Talmudic celebrities in the lands of the Slavs; were Rabbi Akiba or Rabbi Meir of the second century to commune with Rabbi Moses Isserles or Rabbi Solomon Luria of the sixteenth, or were Abaye and Raba of Babylonia to confer with the authors of the *Shakh* and *Taz* who lived in Poland and Lithuania,—they would doubtless return to their eternal rest with the blissful consciousness that the heritage left by them was in safe and trusty hands. Those who condemn Polish Judaism condemn Talmudic Judaism or, more correctly, condemn Diaspora Judaism altogether, and, if logically consistent, are driven to the conclusion, which many a hidebound Zionist will be slow in accepting, that the only Judaism worthy of the name is that produced on Jewish soil, in an independent Jewish atmosphere, and that Judaism in the Dispersion has been one gigantic failure.

The central feature of this Polish Judaism is the same as of Talmudic Judaism: it is the all-embracing influence of religion,—religion in that indissoluble combination of the concrete and abstract, of the ideal and real, or of theory and practice, which has been characteristic of the Jewish genius from the time of the prophets down to this day. It is, to use the ancient rabbinical

terms which are without equivalents in modern phraseology, *Torah* and *Abodah*. On the one hand, it is *Abodah*, religious cult or service, *i. e.*, the *practice* of the Law, the regulation, under the authority of religion, of the highest as well as the lowest functions in life, that ceremonial Judaism which does not claim to bring heaven down upon earth, but has certainly succeeded in lifting the earth a little nearer to heaven, by transforming the physical acts of life into spiritual values. It is, on the other hand, *Torah*, the *study* of the Law, the *theory* of faith, or that *Deah eth-Adonai*, that "*Knowledge* of the Lord" which in biblical phraseology is the nearest approach to what in modern parlance we term religion.

This Judaism, resting upon the two pillars of *Torah* and *Abodah*, to the exclusion of all other extraneous influences, has remained essentially the same throughout all the ages and in all the dwelling places of the Jewish Dispersion. Only once since the loss of its state and land was the tribe of the wandering foot, yielding to the pressure of the environment, diverted from its exclusiveness,—I refer to the Jewish-Arabic period when the beauty of Jafeth, clothed in the garb of the Arabs, sought and obtained admission into the tents of Sem. Like all forms of diversion, the Judaism of the Jewish-Arabic period has a fascination of its own, with a particular force of appeal to us of the modern age who are situated in similar

conditions. But, while fully appreciating and even zealously emulating the shining example of Jewish-Arabic culture, we must not forget that its versatility was purchased at the cost of originality, and that the genuine and unadulterated form of post-biblical Judaism is to be found in those less shining and less fascinating ages in which the Jews were free from outside diversions. The lack, on the one hand, of external interference, *i. e.*, the separate communal and social development of the Jews, in other words, Jewish autonomy, and the absence, on the other hand, of disturbing intellectual factors, *i. e.*, of the influence of a powerful foreign culture, made Talmudic Judaism, with all its intensity and one-sidedness, possible in Palestine and Babylonia; it was due to the same combination of forces that this peculiar phase of Judaism found its most faithful reproduction in Poland and Russia.

Polish-Jewish Autonomy

Jewish autonomy, which, though to be met with in other mediæval countries, yet nowhere assumed so vast and so varied a connotation as it did in the ancient empire of Poland, is one of the fundamental influences which moulded the development of Polish Judaism. It is, therefore, essential to realize the general tendency and the particular features of this Polish-Jewish self-government.

It will be remembered from our first chapter

that Jewish autonomy was only a part of the general social structure of the Polish Commonwealth. Poland was a land of estates. The middle class, or the burghers, who had immigrated from Germany formed a separate estate which was granted full autonomy in the shape of the German so-called "Magdeburg Law." The Jews who were welcomed to Poland under similar circumstances were accorded the same privileges. What the Magdeburg Law was to the Christian immigrants, the Talmudic Law was to the Jewish newcomers. The kings were not only willing but even anxious to recognize Polish Jewry as an autonomous community. For this legal position of Jewry was not only necessitated by the general social stratification of the people of Poland; it was prompted no less by the self-interest of the individual rulers who were handsomely requited for their privileges to the Jews, and it was equally demanded by the exigencies of the Polish exchequer.

Already the charters of Boleslav of Kalish and of Casimir the Great contain in embryonic shape the scheme of Jewish self-government. These rights were gradually amplified by subsequent rulers and reached their culmination in the sixteenth century. The *Magna Charta* of Polish-Jewish autonomy is represented by the royal decree promulgated by King Sigismund II on August 13, 1551, embodying a full-fledged scheme of Jewish self-government.

The basis of this autonomous organization is the Jewish community, or the *Kahal* (this form of the name is used by Russian Jews in preference to the term *Kehillah*). The Jewish Kahal enjoyed the same jurisdiction as the non-Jewish municipality; it might even be said that the jurisdiction of the Kahal was more extensive, for it included the powers wielded among the Christians by the Church organization. The dominion of the Kahal extended not only to the sphere of religion,—religion in the all-embracing Jewish sense of the word, controlling practically every function of physical as well as of intellectual life. It included also full and unrestricted authority over its members in judicial and commercial affairs. In short, every conceivable aspect of Jewish life was regulated and supervised by the Kahal.

It goes without saying that, entirely in keeping with the traditions of Talmudic Judaism, one of the most fundamental concerns of the Kahal was to develop and to maintain the vast and all-comprehensive system of Jewish education which was designed to spread a knowledge of Judaism among all sorts and conditions of Jews, extending alike to tender childhood and venerable old age, providing equally for the exacting requirements of the profound scholar, or *Lamden*, and the modest needs of the common man, or the *Am-Haaretz*. The Kahal was no less solicitous about keeping up a high standard of morality among Jews,

including their commercial and even sexual relations, endeavoring to counteract any tendency towards extravagance and immoderateness, or illegitimate smartness in business. It also took care of the physical cleanliness of the Jew, being charged with the up-keep of the external appearance of the Jewish quarter. The vast and varied functions of the Kahal are perhaps best illustrated by the constitution of the Jewish community of Cracow adopted in 1595 which not only lays down a remarkably broad and systematic curriculum of Jewish education but also fixes the wages of Jewish cooks.

This authority of the Kahal was zealously and indefatigably safeguarded by the Polish Government. The Polish authorities time and again warned the Jews against circumventing the jurisdiction of the Kahal by applying to the non-Jewish courts or the powers of the State. The Kahal was granted the right of imposing severe penalties on its recalcitrant members. It was empowered to subject the latter to the terrible penalty of the *Herem*, or excommunication, and, in cases where the *Herem* proved ineffective and the evil-doers refused to recant, the Polish officials were directed to punish their disregard of Jewish authority by confiscation and even the death sentence.

On this substructure of the autonomous Kahal, whose powers were limited to the *individual* Jewish

community, there gradually arose, as a result of the sense of discipline and efficiency which characterized, to a striking degree, the Jews of early Poland, a *national* organization which embraced the whole Jewry of the country. The separate Kahals banded themselves together in district organizations called *Gueliloth* (from Hebrew *Galil*, "District"), while the latter, in turn, ultimately grew into *Medinoth*, or provincial organizations, comprising the vast provinces of the empire, such as Great Poland, Little Poland, Volhynia, and Galicia or Red Russia. It is a sad reflection on the present disorganized state of Russo-Polish Jewry, who neither in their native nor in their adopted lands can point to a single Chief-rabbinate, that their ancestors of the early sixteenth century grasped so thoroughly the value of a concentrated religious authority. Every province had its own Chief-rabbi who represented both to the Jewish and the Gentile world the highest religious authority of Judaism in his province.

It sounds no less strange to modern Jewish ears that the impetus towards the formation of the national organization of Polish Jewry came from the Polish rabbis. Already in the early sixteenth century the Polish rabbis met frequently to discuss various moot points of rabbinical law which they encountered in the course of their activities and which they were anxious to adjust in a uniform manner. These conferences generally took place

in Lublin, partly because that city was the residence of the famous Rabbi Shalom Shakhna, the father of Polish Talmudism and the Chief-rabbi of Little Poland, partly because Lublin was the place of one of the most celebrated annual fairs which played so important a rôle in Polish life in general and in Polish-Jewish life in particular.

For these fairs served not only as a focus for the commercial activities of the Jews but also for their cultural and social life. It was at these *Yarids*, as these fairs were called by the Jews, that the Jewish *Intelligencia* of that period met, much in the same way as modern scientific assemblies do, in order to exchange views and results of investigation. The Rectors of the *Yeshibahs*, or Talmudic academies, who occupied an exalted rank in the social scheme of Polish Jewry and were acknowledged in this position by the authorities of the state, made their appearance there, accompanied by the choicest of their scholars. The fairs, curious though it may appear to our taste, served at the same time as opportunities for matchmaking. For the Jewish merchants came there not only to attend to business or to brush up their Talmudic studies, but also to choose husbands, naturally among the gifted and learned students of the academies, for their daughters. It is quite possible that eugenic marriages were yet unknown among the Jews of Poland, but chastity and purity were nevertheless matters of course in Polish Jewry, and

the unions concluded on these occasions were prompted neither by the size of the husband's pocket-book nor by the conventionalities of his social position nor by the superficialities of his demeanour and appearance, but were primarily determined by the standards of *Torah* and *Abodah*, the degree to which the bridegroom excelled in the knowledge and practice of the word of God.

Council of the Four Lands

These rabbinical conferences, one of the principal features of these fairs, became more and more periodical until they were consolidated in the *Waad Arba Aratzoth*, the "Council of the Four Lands," comprising the separate organizations of the four provinces of the Crown, or Poland proper as distinguished from Lithuania, viz., Great Poland, Little Poland, Galicia, and Volhynia. The Duchy of Lithuania originally belonged to the same Council, but since 1623 it had an organization of its own which, however, continued to co-operate with the larger Council. The membership of the Council of the Four Lands which met twice a year, generally in Lublin and Yaroslav, was made up of six prominent Polish rabbis and a number of scholarly laymen, a class so peculiarly characteristic of the social make-up of Polish Jewry. Altogether the number of its members amounted to about thirty, favourably contrasting with some modern Polish-Jewish institutions in which the

number of directors sometimes exceeds that of contributors. This *Waad*, whose president was practically the head of Polish Jewry, constituted a regular Jewish government. It was the equivalent of the Polish parliament or *Saym*, except that it manifested an infinitely greater respect for law and order. The *Waad* was acknowledged as such by the kings who officially refer to it as the "Congressus Judaicus."

The Council of the Four Lands exercised the same functions in national affairs which the Kahals did in the life of the individual communities. It regulated the relations not only between Jews and Jews but also between the Jews and the non-Jewish world. It made itself responsible for the taxation of the Jews, arranging the total amount with the exchequer. It apportioned this amount among the individual communities which, in turn, distributed the taxes over their members.

Many a modern Jew who laments the eagerness of Jews to appear before the government as the spokesmen of their people will learn with pleasant surprise that the Council appointed a regular *Shtadlan* or Syndic who acted as the accredited champion of Jewish interests before the king and the diet. The political foresight of the *Waad* may be gauged from its provision that a sum of 1000 gulden be held in cash in every province for the emergency of a ritual-murder libel

and that plans be formulated for securing further funds, if required by the circumstances. The Council frequently endorsed the regulations and restrictions passed by the Polish diets, warning the Jews against any infraction of the law. It endeavoured to check the occasional tendency among Jews to display their intellectual acumen in their commercial transactions with non-Jews.

In internal Jewish affairs the Council acted as a magnified Kahal. Following the mandate as well as the example of Talmudic Judaism, it gave its first and foremost attention to the problem of Jewish education, seeing to it that the whole country was covered with a close network of elementary schools or *Heders* and secondary colleges or *Yeshibahs*. It controlled—here again the modern Jew will be tempted to transgress the tenth commandment—the literary output of the Jews, no book being allowed to pass a Polish-Jewish printing press, without having first secured its *Haskamah*, or approbation. It protested against the tendency towards extravagance and luxury in dress, which latter failing was already then typical of the Jewish fair sex. These multifarious activities of the Kahals became particularly important after 1648 when the great country-wide calamity threatened to disrupt Polish Jewry. It was largely due to the wise and well-directed efforts of the Council that the Jews of Poland

were able to survive the unparalleled sufferings of those terrible years.

It is true, the national organization of the Polish Jews did not escape the general process of degeneration which vitiated all the political agencies of Poland. It became more and more oligarchic and despotic and later on was not free from the contamination of graft and politics. Yet, with all its shortcomings, it remained a powerful factor for good throughout the ages and was greatly instrumental in furthering the development and progress of Polish Jewry.

The Council of the Four Lands was abolished in 1764, six years before the first partition of Poland, when the government decided to take over the collection of the Jewish head-tax and, having no further financial interest in a national Jewish organization, robbed it of its prerogatives. The Kahals or individual communities were still allowed to exist until they, too, were abolished by the "Kingdom of Poland," already under Russian suzerainty, in 1821.

As for Russia, *i.e.*, the Polish provinces incorporated in the Russian Empire between 1772 and 1795, there the government, as we have seen in the second chapter, looked from the very beginning with undisguised suspicion upon the existence of an autonomous Jewish organization. The Kahals were more and more curtailed in their functions until they were finally abolished by Nicholas I in 1844.

The Non-Jewish Environment

This much for the external agency of Jewish autonomy. As for the internal factor in the spiritual development of Polish Jewry, it was no less important, although it was primarily of a negative character. It was the lack of a strong cultural pressure on the part of the non-Jewish environment. Prior to the sixteenth century Polish culture was of little significance and had, moreover, not yet assumed a distinct national character. The middle class which consisted of German immigrants were still keeping up their affiliations with German culture. At a somewhat earlier period German had been the language employed in the courts and even in the churches, while the Polish language, as we have observed on an earlier occasion, began to assert itself as a medium of literature as late as the sixteenth century and even then had to divide this honour with Latin. Apart from it, education, like every other privilege in Poland, was the monopoly of the Shlakhta, while the burghers were debarred from it.

This state of affairs, coupled with the social ostracism practised against the Jews, made it both necessary and possible for the latter to preserve their old dialect, the German vernacular which they had brought over with them from Germany. By mixing with Hebrew and Slavonian elements, this

purely Teuton language was gradually transformed into Yiddish. It may sound paradoxical, yet it is none the less true, and applies with equal force to other European and Oriental languages adopted by the Jews during their Dispersion, that the Yiddish dialect is nearer to its linguistic source than the German language. For the German stock of the Yiddish vernacular which was brought over by the Jews in the twelfth century from the shores of the Rhine represents a very much older phase of Teuton speech than the modern language of Germany. The same isolation of the Jews affected their development in every other sphere of human life, including the externality of dress, so that the Jews were able and, under the circumstances, were, indeed, compelled, to live a life of their own, not only politically but also socially and spiritually.

If we may illustrate the position of the Polish Jews by a homely simile,—homely in the very literal sense of the word,—we may say that the Polish Commonwealth was like an apartment house in which every estate occupied a separate suite and in which the Jews, yielding in equal measure to an inner desire and to the force of circumstances, had chosen a little apartment of their own. In this apartment, which, to be sure, was on occasions raided and invaded by the other occupants of the house, the Jews were able to maintain themselves throughout the whole duration of the Polish Republic.

Conditions of Inner Life

In order to comprehend the inner condition of Polish Jewry, it will be worth our while to catch a glimpse of the interior of this Jewish residence. We shall observe it at its best if we will attempt to visualize it the way it looked in the sixteenth century, which was the Golden Age of Polish Jewry, both from the political and the spiritual point of view.

The apartment occupied by Polish Jewry strikes us, on entering it, as modest but at the same time as comfortable. There are no luxuries in it; yet it is well stocked with all the necessaries of life, and neatness compensates us for the absence of luxury. For, in spite of all commercial disabilities to which the Jews of Poland were subjected as early as in the sixteenth century, they managed to earn a livelihood, and Rabbi Solomon Luria, a famous contemporary, incidentally informs us that even the Jewish beggars could, without exception, afford to put on a clean shirt on the Sabbath-day. An air of peacefulness and repose pervades the dwelling place of Polish Jewry. United and disciplined by a firm organization, the Jews of Poland were saved from the spirit of disharmony and dissension which was during the same period rending in twain the communities of Germany.

A prominent feature of Polish-Jewish life was *Guemilluth Hasadim*, "the doing of kindly acts,"—

the unassuming title under which philanthropy figures in the vocabulary of the Rabbis. Nathan Hannover, a trustworthy chronicler who wrote in the following century, gives a glowing account of this charitable disposition of the Polish Jews, and we learn with pleasant surprise that their charity was not merely a spontaneous outburst of the tender Jewish heart but that it expressed itself in the form of a systematic and well-organized endeavour.

The Polish Jews not only provided generously for the physical wants of their poor; they were just as solicitous about their spiritual needs, and, in accordance with the Talmudic injunction: "Take heed of the children of the poor, for from them does the Torah come forth!" education was made the inalienable prerogative of every Jew. It may possibly not appeal to the taste of our modern suffragettes, yet it speaks well for the comprehensiveness of Polish-Jewish philanthropy that, according to the testimony of the same writer, no Jewish girl, however poor, was allowed to reach the age of eighteen, without having been happily piloted into the haven of holy matrimony. The Polish Jews showed the same charitable interest in their brethren of other lands, and those familiar with modern Jewish conditions in Germany will smile at the pranks of history when they are told that throngs of German *Schnorrers* were thriving, particularly when endowed with Jewish learning,

on the generous and sometimes all too credulous disposition of the Jews of Poland.

Contact with Non-Jews

Nor were the Polish Jews completely estranged from their Christian neighbours, as might perhaps be assumed by those who judge them by latter-day conditions. To be sure, an intimate association with the non-Jewish environment was out of the question, largely through the attitude of that environment itself. The relations between Jews and non-Jews, if we may pursue our "homely" simile, were limited to occasional meetings in the hall. For such meetings, however, the Polish Jews were fully prepared. We have already commented on the fact that, in spite of all restrictions, the Jews of Poland continued to wear the Polish national dress whose offshoots today, still recognizable by their Slavonic terms, such as *Kaftan*, *Kapota*, *Zhupitza*, *Delie*, etc., are considered a symbol of Jewish orthodoxy. The Jews, here again in spite of all official prohibitions, occasionally carried swords, and some Jewish homes, a circumstance scarcely conceivable in later times, were decorated with arms on their walls. Even the intimate domain of Jewish culinary art, as is still evidenced by the names of many Polish-Jewish dishes, was not inaccessible to the influences of the Christian environment.

As far as their spiritual life is concerned, we hear

of a number of Polish Jews who in 1501 took their Doctor's degree in Padua, and a century later, in 1623, an envious Polish physician felt the need of venting his spleen against successful Jewish rivals in a special publication. Rabbi Solomon Luria, referred to previously, bitterly complains that the *Bahurs*, or students of the Talmudic academies, were engaged in the study of the ungodly Aristotle. His great compeer, Rabbi Moses Isserles of Cracow, was a zealous student of mathematics and astronomy and studied and appreciated the philosophic standard work of Maimonides.

It is a significant fact pointing in the same direction that the Reformation which deeply stirred the souls of the Poles found an echo in the minds of the Polish Jews. In 1581 a certain Nahman of Belzhytz published a pamphlet in Polish, in reply to an attack upon Judaism by a Polish adept of the Reformation. In 1594 another Polish Jew, Isaac of Troki, a member of the Karaite sect, issued his *Hizzuk Emunah*, "Fortification of the Faith," that violent onslaught on the dominant religion which reveals an intimate acquaintance not only with the literary sources of Christianity but also with the religious affairs of Christian Poland, a book which was afterwards translated into several European languages, and was greatly admired by a man like Voltaire. However, despised by the Shlakhta, and hated by the burghers, the Polish

Jew felt most comfortable within the walls of his home where the two repositories of traditional Judaism, *Torah* and *Abodah*, provided him with sufficient pabulum for mind and soul.

Jewish Ceremonialism

To begin with the latter, the *practice* of the Law, which to the Polish Jew was not a curse but the choicest blessing on earth, for which he fervently thanked his Creator every morning of his life, filled every nook and corner of his existence.

Like all other phases in the development of Polish Judaism, this tendency, too,—the crystallization of Jewish ceremonialism,—reached its culmination in the sixteenth century. About the middle of that century the *Shulhan Arukh*, the "Dressed Table," was given to the world, that much-maligned and little-known code of the Spaniard Joseph Caro, which not only summed up the Jewish law, as contained in Bible and Talmud, but also solidified the immense liquid mass of religious customs which had sprung up since the conclusion of the Talmud, during an interval of fully a thousand years.

It is a striking example of the thoroughness and promptness with which the exchange of spiritual goods was then carried on in the Jewish world that, almost immediately after its publication, the "Dressed Table" of the Spanish rabbi, now residing in Palestine, found its way into Poland,

where the famous Rabbi Moses Isserles of Cracow provided it with a "Table-cloth" ("Mappah," the title of his annotations to the *Shulhan Arukh*). Isserles succeeded, as it were, in Polonizing the work of the Spaniard, for he supplemented it by the additional usages and restrictions current among Polish Jews, and in this improved form the *Shulhan Arukh* became the official code of law of Polish Jewry.

It is true, the *Shulhan Arukh* did not attain to this pre-eminence in Polish-Jewish life entirely without a struggle. It had to endure both competition and opposition, the former represented by men like Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe (1530–1612), the author of the *Lebushim* ("Raiments"), a rival code of law; the latter championed by no less an authority than Rabbi Solomon Luria who perceived in the attempts at codification the danger of a petrifaction of Judaism. But neither the competition nor the opposition was in any way prompted by the gravity of the burdens imposed by the *Shulhan Arukh*. If anything, they were rather inspired by the excessive scrupulousness of the Polish Jews in the performance of Jewish ceremonies. The craving of Polish Jewry for *Abodah*, for religious practice, was so powerful that even the heavily laden "Table" of Caro was not altogether able to satisfy it.

Jewish Intellectualism

But far more than the tendency of *Abodah*, which after all the Jews of Poland shared with the

rest of their co-religionists, was *Torah* the peculiar possession of Polish Jewry. The *study* of the Law was the real glory of the Jews of Poland and its intensity has rarely been matched and never surpassed in any other country and at any other period. Polish Judaism was, in this respect, an improved edition of Talmudic Judaism, both by the profundity and the wide currency of its Jewish scholarship, the latter embracing not only the sources of the Talmudic period but the immense mass of rabbinical literature accumulated during the millennium of intense mental productivity after the Talmud, to say nothing of the vast Cabbalistic literature the centre of which was occupied by its source book, the mysterious *Zohar*.

The Polish lands were thickly strewn with *Heders* and *Yeshibahs*, providing elementary and secondary education for all classes of Jews. But the study of the *Torah* was by no means limited to these official nurseries of Jewish scholarship. Every Polish Jew was a student. To quote again our familiar guide to the inner history of Polish Jewry, Rabbi Nathan Hannover, there was no community which did not provide ample facilities for the education of its members, whether juvenile or adult. There was no family which could not boast of a *Lamden*, or an accomplished scholar, in its midst. Sometimes it was the father, sometimes the son, or son-in-law, sometimes it was a poor student, or *Bahur*, who was offered food and

shelter to enable him to pursue his studies; sometimes all of these together could be found under one roof. It was not unusual to find a community of fifty which could point to thirty men in its midst possessing the title of *Morenu*, corresponding in the scale of higher education somewhat to the modern Ph.D. And yet there was no risk of mental over-production nor the danger of an intellectual proletariat. For the Polish Jews strictly adhered to the Talmudic injunction that the Torah be studied *lishmah*, for its own sake, for spiritual self-improvement, and be not made "a spade to dig with."

This general diffusion of Jewish learning becomes the more remarkable when we call to our minds the intellectual standards of Polish Jewry which, in the case of the scholar, implied an intimate acquaintance with the well-nigh boundless Talmudic and post-Talmudic literature,—the "Talmudic Ocean," as it was frequently termed,—covering every conceivable phase of human life and thought, as well as in many cases, a knowledge of mystic lore which was considered an integral part of Judaism. The Jews of Poland, in very truth, lived up to the ideal picture drawn by the Prophet of the Exile (Isaiah liv., 13): "*All* their children were taught of the Lord," and it is only fair to add that the other aspiration, enunciated by the prophet in the same breath, was no less realized by them during the Golden Age of their history: "Great,

indeed, was the peace of their children." The shadows of strife and dissension fled before the light of knowledge, except for the *Milhamtah-shel-Torah*, "the War of the Torah," the intense, though peaceful and harmless, struggle on the battlefield of learning.

Thus Polish Jewry, notwithstanding its whole-hearted devotion to the knowledge and practice of religion, was yet not a hierarchy, a government by priests. It was rather, in accordance with the democratic ideal of the Bible, "a *kingdom* of priests," where all men were created equal, with an even chance to attain to the same distinction. The authority of the official religious leader, profoundly revered though he was, was frequently assisted, equalled, and even surpassed by the influence of the *Lamden*, or lay-scholar. Perhaps one might say, employing the phraseology of Carlyle, that Polish Jewry was a "heroarchy," a government by the Hero who dominated the ideals and aspirations of his fellow-men, the Hero being represented by the Man of Letters, clad in the robe of the Polish-Jewish *Lamden*.

Literary Productivity

The literary aspect of this Polish-Jewish culture, *i. e.*, its manifestation in written works, is no less a product of the sixteenth century. It was in the beginning of that century that Rabbi Jacob Pollak (d. 1541), the famous Bohemian rabbi, who is

sometimes regarded as the originator of the ingenious method of Talmudic casuistry, characteristically known as *pilpul* (literally "pepper") moved from Prague to Lublin and established there a *Yeshibah* for the promotion of Talmudic study. His pupil Rabbi Shalom Shakhna (d. 1558), previously referred to as the Chief-rabbi of Little Poland, is looked upon as the father of Polish Talmudism, which was, in turn, firmly implanted in Polish soil by his famous disciples, frequently mentioned on these pages, Rabbi Moses Isserles (called by his initials REMA, died 1572) and Rabbi Solomon Luria (similarly called MAHARSHAL, died 1573).

This glorious tradition was continued by Rabbi Meir of Lublin (called in abbreviated form MAHARAM, d. 1616), Rabbi Samuel Edels (called MAHARSHA, d. 1631),—the familiar companions of every advanced Talmud student,—Rabbi Sabbatai Cohen (called, by the initials of his principal work, SHAKH, d. 1663), Rabbi David Halevi (called, in a similar way, TAZ, d. 1667),—the two famous commentators of the *Shulhan Arukh*,—accompanied and followed by a whole host of celebrities who had only one purpose in life: to fathom the meaning of the Law and to spread the knowledge thereof among their people.

Standards of Judgment

Of course, in judging this remarkably advanced stage of Polish-Jewish culture, we have no right

to apply our own standards. It seems, indeed, utterly absurd that the champions of modernity, whose great boast is the theory of evolution, the notion of the ceaseless changes to which human thought no less than human life is subjected, should arrogantly lay claim to finality when their own thought is concerned. The sixteenth century cannot be judged by the standards of the twentieth. If Polish-Jewish culture—and in this regard the criticism applies equally to Talmudic culture in general—seems small and petty to us, it is no less our fault than that of the past ages. The Talmudic dissertation about the egg which was laid on a holy-day may have no interest for us, but we are scarcely more interested in the Conjunction of the Human Mind with the Active Intellect, that profound metaphysical conception of Jewish-Arabic thought to which we are otherwise willing to pay our tribute of homage and admiration. If Polish-Jewish intellectualism appears barren to us, we must not forget that, from the point of view of the Polish Jews themselves, whose life was dominated by Talmudic law both in its civil and ceremonial aspect, it was productive of rich fruit in its constant application to reality. If that intellectualism seems too cold and unemotional to us, let us recall the enthusiasm with which it was cultivated and let us not overlook the fact that its chill was taken off by a dash of warm-hearted Jewish mysticism which appealed no less strongly to the emotions.

On the contrary, disharmonious as Polish Judaism may appear to the modern age, in its own environment it was essentially harmonious. Noble living and high thinking characterized in equal measure the Jews of Poland, and in this ideal atmosphere even their commercialism was robbed of its sordidness, for, as they sang in their lullabies, "*Toire is die beste Skhoire*," "the Torah is the best merchandise." The Polish Jews were truly justified in claiming that the name "Polonia," as they called their country, was the equivalent of the Hebrew phrase *Po-lon-ia*, "Here dwelleth the Lord." They consecrated their life to God and they were anxious to serve Him with all their hearts, with all their souls, and with all their might.

Decline of Polish Judaism

The inner life of Polish Jewry, like its external political and social development, passes its zenith in the sixteenth century. The following century marks the beginning of its decline. The crisis is again represented by that fateful year 1648 which played such terrible havoc with the outward prosperity of the Jews of Poland. During the tragic decade inaugurated by that year nearly 700 Jewish communities, mostly situated in the south-west, in Volhynia, Podolia, and the Ukraïna, were annihilated, and with them were destroyed numberless *Yeshibahs* and other agencies of Polish-Jewish culture.

The spiritual effect of these fiendish persecutions upon Polish Jewry was even greater than the physical. A black cloud of depression settled upon the mental horizon of Polish Jewry, in painful contrast to the brilliancy in her days of prosperity. What in the sixteenth century was but faintly outlined came out in bold relief in the following age. Jewish mysticism which had formerly served as a healthy counter-irritant against excessive intellectualism now degenerates into the so-called "Practical Cabbala," with its sombre spirit of asceticism and superstition.

The merciless persecutions and the harassing ritual-murder libels of the seventeenth century throw a pall of gloom upon the life of Polish Jews. The former joyousness of existence gives way to melancholic other-worldliness. The thought of the people turns away from the world of reality, which to them was truly a valley of tears, and loses itself in the unknown regions of the world beyond the grave. The literature of the period, reflecting this state of mind, is full of speculations about the life hereafter, about Hell and Paradise (mostly about the former), or about the mysterious agencies haunting man on this earth, such as demons, evil spirits, magicians, amulets, and so on. We have the evidence of several Polish Jews of the seventeenth and eighteenth century who bitterly complain that no section of Jewry was so much given over to superstitious ideas and practices as

the Jews of their own land, though it must, in all fairness, be recalled that the same characteristic applies to Poland in general, where, in the age of the French encyclopædists, they still burned witches at the stake.

The autonomous organization of Polish Jewry deteriorates more and more, both through the hostility of the government and the inner forces of decomposition, until in 1764 it receives its death-blow. With the collapse of Jewish self-government Polish Talmudism which, with all its subtleties, had never lost its contact with reality, is now deprived of the vivifying breath of practical life and becomes gradually petrified in lifeless casuistry. Polish intellectualism degenerates into scholasticism. The *pilpul* method, originally used as a mental stimulant, is turned into logic-chopping and theory-mongering, which engulfs the whole being of the Polish Jew, laying its impress even on his mode of expression and gesticulation.

As the hostility of the outside world grows in fierceness and extensiveness, the Polish Jew withdraws more and more into the protective shell of his inner life. Talmudism becomes to him a sort of oxygen helmet which enables him to breathe in a stuffy atmosphere, but also produces upon him the abnormally exhilarating, nerve-racking effect of artificial respiration. In spite of all the influences of Cabbalistic mysticism, the mentality of the Polish Jew grows, if I may use the expression,

at the expense of his emotionality. While in the classic period of rabbinic tradition the ideal Jewish characteristic was found to consist in a "good heart" (*Pirke Aboth*, ii., 13), the quality most admired among Polish Jews is now *a guter Kopf*, "a good head," or *an offener Moiakh*, "an open brain." This hyper-mentality leads to combativeness, insincerity, and intellectual snobbishness. Such, however, is the fate of every plant which has been detached from its soil and has been deprived of its natural conditions of development.

Intellectual Revival in Lithuania

Withal enormous spiritual powers were still slumbering in Polish Jewry, but their development and manifestation were forced into a different channel, taking at the same time a different geographical direction. From the south-west which had suffered most severely from the ravages of the Cossacks and those that followed in their wake, Polish-Jewish culture turns to the north-west, to White Russia, and particularly to Lithuania, where once more it blossoms forth in its pristine beauty. This renaissance finds its embodiment in Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (1720–1797), on whom popular affection and scholarly admiration have conferred the venerable and long-extinguished title of *Gaon*, that unique personality who appears as the incarnation of *Torah* and *Abodah*, who concentrates,

as in a focus, the glorious traditions of Polish-Jewish culture, without the encrustations which marred its beauty in later days.

The influence of the Gaon of Vilna who, in an age of scholasticism, originated methods of research which are still followed by modern Jewish scholarship, was carried on by his disciples, particularly by Rabbi Hayyim Volozhyner, who gave it (in 1803) a permanent abode in the *Yeshibah* of Volozhyn,—whence his epithet. The academy of Volozhyn, which first took shape in the mind of the Gaon, soon became a famous seat of learning which down to our own days has been the mental power-house of Lithuanian Jewry, sending forth not only a host of Talmudic celebrities but also, entirely in opposition to its original purpose, some of the guiding spirits in the Jewish modernist movement.

These traditions, called to new life by the Gaon, have been maintained by the Jewry of Lithuania down to our own time, and they have laid their indelible impress upon it, marking it off sharply from the rest of Russo-Polish Jewry. The Lithuanian Jews of today may be designated as the heirs of the Polish Jews of the sixteenth century. In more ways than one the Lithuanian Jews, or the *Litvaks*, as they are termed in Russia, may be said to be the Scotchmen of Polish Jewry. They exhibit the same hardiness and energy, the same push, the same "canniness," the same predilec-

tion for philosophical and theological speculation. Finally the Lithuanian Jews are no doubt the best Bible students among the Jews of Russia.

Mystic and Messianic Tendencies

An essentially different development was in store for Polish Judaism in the south-west, in Volhynia, Podolia, and the Ukraïna. This was, in part, due to historic conditions, the destruction of the Talmudic seats of learning during the Khmielnitzki persecutions. But it was certainly due, to no less an extent, to the strong emotional make-up of the Jews of the south-west, a region in which the number of Jewish males can still be gauged from the number of violins hanging on the walls of Jewish homes and which has contributed to the modern world a larger quota of musical and other artistic geniuses, giving voice and shape to human emotions, than any other section of Jewry.

The profound emotionalism of these Jews was left unsatisfied by the logical subtleties of the Talmud, which were the delight of the other Jews, and their artistic temperament was averse to that minute and excessive ceremonialism which had gradually assumed the form of stern asceticism. The study of the Talmud deteriorated more and more in that part of Jewry and slowly became the monopoly of an intellectual minority. Talmudic logic, with its cold and implacable reasoning, did not appeal to the south-western Jews whose

hearts, moreover, were still reverberating with the horrors they had undergone at the hands of the Cossacks. Gradually a gulf opened up between the few and the many, between the *Talmid Haham*, the scholar, on the one hand, and the *Am-Haaretz*, the ignoramus, on the other, not unsimilar to the split which divided Jewry at the time of the rise of Christianity.

This condition of affairs was fraught with perilous consequences for the further development of Polish Jewry and was still more aggravated by the turn of events among the Jews outside of Poland.

It is not accidental that the year 1648 which marks the beginning of the great crisis in Polish-Jewish history is also the year in which the Pseudo-Messiah Sabbatai Zevi made his public appearance in far-off Turkey. The impressionable Sabbatai had heard from the lips of Jewish refugees, who had fled in large numbers from the persecutions of the Cossacks, the blood-curdling tales of the slaughter and torture of which they had been eye-witnesses, and he looked upon these horrors as an unmistakable sign of the approaching redemption of the Jewish people.

With no less impatience did the Jews of Poland, exasperated by their ever-increasing sufferings, look forward to the long-promised redemption of Israel. As soon as they, in turn, learned of the appearance of Sabbatai, they sent messengers to

him who came back with wondrous stories about the glories of the new redeemer. The belief in Sabbatai Zevi, together with the heterodoxies promulgated by him, began rapidly to spread in the south-west. A Christian contemporary, the Ukraïnian writer Galatovski, informs us that the Jews of his province abandoned home and property, claiming that they would soon be carried on a cloud—the aërial journey is an integral part of the popular Messianic notions—to Jerusalem. The proximity of the Ukraina to the Turkish Empire and the close commercial relations of the Polish Jews to that country furthered the spread of all kinds of extravagant doctrines, some of which were distinctly subversive of Judaism. It was the fever which reveals the hidden disease. This disease soon broke out openly in the form of the Frankist movement.

Jacob Frank (1726–1791), or, as he was originally called, Jacob Leibovich (son of Leib), was a Podolian Jew who, during his sojourn in Turkey, had imbibed the heterodox notions current among the local Sabbatian heretics. Untrained in the Talmudic culture of his Polish environment, he discarded the Talmud, setting the mysterious *Zohar* in its place, and, unrestrained by any religious principle or moral consideration, he catered to the masses by setting up a cult of sensuousness and immorality which was a violent reaction against the prevailing spirit of asceticism.

Ever looking out for his personal aggrandizement, this astute adventurer finally landed, with several hundred of his followers, in the bosom of the Church, being baptized with great pomp, under the patronage of the Polish king, in Warsaw.

The movement of the Frankists affected but a fraction of Polish Jewry. Yet it luridly revealed the inner longings of the Polish-Jewish mass which were struggling for expression. It was providential that Frankism was supplanted by Hassidism which forced these longings back into the channel of Judaism.

Rise of Hassidism

Israel "the Miracle-worker" (in Hebrew *Baal-Shem-Tob*, abbreviated to BESHT, born c. 1700, died 1760), the founder of Hassidism, was born somewhere on the border of Wallachia, while his later life was spent in the Carpathians in Eastern Galicia. He was a native and a product of the south-west, that same south-west in which, as was pointed out before, historic conditions had created a rift in Jewry, not unlike the one that threatened to disrupt Judaism in the beginning of the Christian era.

Being both by temperament and training, or lack of training, a man of the people, whom he also attracted as a healer,—the latter activity forming in popular estimation part of the profession of a *Baal-Shem-Tob*,—the BESHT resented the mental

snobbishness and the "holier-than-thou" attitude of the intellectual minority of the Ukraïna. He keenly felt the bitter neglect in which the masses had been allowed to stagnate by the classes, and he considered it his duty to throw in his lot with the publicans and sinners. He, too, violently denied that he had come to add to the Law or to take away from it; he merely wished to reassert old truths which seemed to have been forgotten. He championed the cause of a warm-hearted life-giving emotionalism against the presumptions of the chilly Talmudic intellectualism of his age. The *Hassid*, or Devout, was to him more than the *Talmid-Haham*, or dry-as-dust rabbinical student. He taught that prayer, offered up fervently, brought man nearer to God than cold abstract scholarship. He reaffirmed the rights of religious joyousness against the gloomy spirit of asceticism which had descended like a blight on Polish Jewry; the injunction of the Psalmist (c., 2): "Serve the Lord with *gladness:* come before his presence with *rejoicing*," was to him expressive of the true spirit of Judaism. The consciousness of sin which weighed heavily upon the masses who, having been removed from the sources of Judaism, were pining for salvation, was lifted by his doctrine of the *Tzaddik*, or the Righteous Man, who acted as mediator between God and man. And, what was more important, he himself appeared in the eyes of the people as the embodiment of the ideal

Tzaddik who by his piety and personality brought man nearer to God.

The doctrine of Hassidism, as enunciated by the BESHT, was undoubtedly the right remedy for the ills of the time which it had set out to heal. Yet, entirely unbeknown to it, the new teaching contained elements which might have perpetuated the rift in Jewish life and widened it to a permanent schism. Fortunately, however, the disciples of Israel *Baal-Shem-Tob* were not fishermen but students, not men of the masses who were hostile to the classes, but men of the classes who were ready to descend to the masses. His successors reestablished the contact between sectarian Hassidism and traditional Judaism, by incorporating the former in the latter, by leading the violent torrent of Hassidic emotion into the broad and placid current of Jewish doctrine and practice.

In this transformation, as part and parcel of rabbinical Judaism, Hassidism began rapidly to spread. In a marvellously short time it conquered the whole of the south-west where the soil was ready for its reception. It invaded a little later Poland proper, now the province of Russian Poland, where it was merged with the strong spirit of Talmudism peculiar to that region, so that down to our own days the Hassidic scholar and the scholarly Hassid is a characteristic Jewish type of that section of Polish Jewry.

It penetrated even as far as the north-west,

pushing its way into the province of White Russia, bordering on Lithuania. But there, characteristically enough, championed by the famous Talmudist and thinker, Rabbi Shneor Zalman of Ladi (1747–1812), it assumed the intellectual hue of its environment, and down to this day his followers, the so-called HABAD (from the initials of the three Hebrew words: *Hokmah*, *Binah*, *Deah*, Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge), form, as it were, the vanguard of a mystico-rational Hassidism.

The only province which was able to withstand the compact of the new movement was Lithuania, the stronghold of Rabbinism, where its spread was checked just as much by the innate rationalistic tendency of its Jewry as by the passionate protest of its guiding spirit, the Gaon of Vilna, and down to our own times Lithuania has remained the bulwark of the *Mithnagdim*, or "Opponents," as the opponents of Hassidism were called for short.

Effects of Hassidism

Looking backward from the distance of a century, marked by radical changes in the life of the Jews, we are bound to acknowledge that Hassidism saved Judaism in Poland. Without it, the longings of the people, unsatisfied by the contemporary tendencies of official Judaism, might have found an outlet in a separate sect or heterodoxy, away from the high road of historic Jewish development. Hassidism introduced a ray of

poetry into the grey every-day life of the Polish Jews. It infused *Hithlahabuth*, ecstasy and enthusiasm, into the souls stunned by the shocks of outward persecution and chilled by the abstract logic of Talmudic reasoning. It rehabilitated simple-minded, warm-hearted piety which had been almost choked by the rigorous conception of duty characteristic of Polish Rabbinism. It made life, with all its inconceivable misery and oppression, not only tolerable but enjoyable. It reawakened the old *Simhah-shel-Mitzvah*, "the joyousness in fulfilling the Law," the spirit of optimism and sociability, which had been clouded by the pessimistic *Judenschmerz*, the asceticism and other-worldliness of official Judaism in Poland. Even its cult of Tzaddikism, fraught, as it was, with so many extravagances and abuses, introduced, or reintroduced, into Judaism the worship of the Hero, with the ennobling effect which the admiration of one higher than oneself always entails.

But it also had its negative effects and bred evils from which Russian (and Galician) Jewry suffers until this day. It accentuated the spirit of Jewish separateness which, as it was, had become only too strongly accentuated in the latter part of Polish-Jewish history. Its emotionalism was subversive of the spirit of organization and discipline which had characterized the earlier stages of Polish Judaism. The warmth of Jewish mysticism rose to the fever of Tzaddikism, with the many negative,

nay, repellent features peculiar to its later development, with the result, subversive of all Polish-Jewish tradition, that Jewish religious leadership became vested in a caste of hereditary priests.

Still, taking all in all, Hassidism, no less than Rabbinism presented one fundamental aspect which distinguishes it favourably from modern Judaism. *They were harmonious.* The Jews of Poland, to whichever camp they belonged, whether they paid their allegiance to the intellectual Rabbinism of the north-west or to the emotional Hassidism of the south-west, lived and acted in harmony. To quote Carlyle again:

> The thoughts they had were the parents of the actions they did; their feelings were parents of their thoughts; it was the unseen and spiritual in them that determined the outward and actual;—their religion, as I say, was the great fact about them.

Danger of Isolation

This fundamental characteristic has remained the central feature of Polish-Jewish life down to our own days. The modern historian, who, being aware of the vicissitudes of time, judges every age by its own standards, can only point to one mistake of which Polish Jewry may be found guilty,—but that one mistake was fatal. As a matter of fact, the mistake was not one of positive action but rather of passive short-sighted inaction.

For while the Jewry of Poland remained stationary in one spot, the world around them was undergoing a radical transformation. Clinging with greater tenacity than ever to their separate dwelling and to every fixture in it, shutting out the slightest ingress of light, air, and sound from the outside, the Jews of Poland failed to perceive that the whole structure of which their dwelling formed a part was tottering to its fall and threatening to bury them beneath its ruins.

A new task arose before Polish Jewry, or rather before the few among them who were not totally blindfolded: to get out of their isolation which had become untenable, to come once more in touch with the current of humanity, and to find a new basis of readjustment between Judaism and the non-Jewish world. The old Judeo-centric conception of the Ghetto, which placed the Jewish people apart from humanity, had to give way to the new anthropo-centric point of view, which assigned Judaism a place in the midst of the civilized world. This task, involving a mental revolution, less extensive but not less radical than the one which is associated with the name of Copernicus, was taken over by the *Haskalah*.

Rise of Haskalah Movement

The movement inaugurated by the *Haskalah* can be dealt with briefly, because its process is

not yet completed and, therefore, transgresses the limits of an historic account.

Haskalah, the Hebrew word for Enlightenment, a translation of the German *Aufklaerung*, was, like the word itself, a product "made in Germany." It was in that country that the isolation of Ghetto Judaism first gave way to association and, later on, to assimilation with the non-Jewish environment. The spirit of separateness in German Jewry, prior to the appearance of Mendelssohn, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, was just as intense as in Poland. The ancestor of the famous German banking house of the Bleichroeders was expelled from Berlin, at the instance of the Jewish authorities, because he was caught with a German book in his pocket. Another contemporary German Jew, by the name of Abraham Posner, who had had the audacity of taking off his beard, was forced by a royal warrant, exacted by the Jewish community of Berlin from Frederick the Great, to leave this traditional symbol of Jewish manhood untouched. But with the advent of Mendelssohn (1729–1786) a rapid transformation was taking place in the lands of Teuton culture.

Two tendencies, leading in entirely different directions, had asserted themselves in this process of adaptation, and both of them anteceded the Russian-Jewish *Haskalah*. To remain within the limits of our "homely" simile, the Jews of the Ghetto either left their residence, taking all their

valuables and heirlooms with them, and went out in search for a new home, more in harmony with modern tastes and requirements, or they abandoned their residence with all that there was in it, gave up housekeeping altogether, and went to board with their neighbours. The latter alternative was chosen by the Jews of Germany and led in a remarkably short time to a radical transformation resulting in many cases in complete absorption.

Mendelssohn, himself a staunch adherent of historic Judaism, endeavoured to bring about this rejuvenation of Judaism from within. On the one hand, his translation of the Bible was to lead the Jews from the stagnant waters of their Ghetto culture to the living fountain of the Scriptures. On the other hand, the Hebrew language, restored to its classic purity, was to convey the spirit and content of European culture to isolated Jewry. The *Meassef*, a Hebrew periodical founded with the aid of Mendelssohn, was to be, as its name indicated, the "rear-guard" in this process of Jewish modernization.

The results, however, were different from what had probably been anticipated by the leaders of the movement. Both the German Bible translation and the modernized Hebrew literature served as a means to an end, to draw the Jews into the fold of modern culture, and they were discarded as soon as the end was reached. They were nothing but a

framework which is torn down when the structure is completed. Germany, the homeland of the Hebrew renaissance, was the first to advocate a Hebrew-less Judaism and the land of Jewish saints became the hotbed of Jewish assimilationists.

The other tendency was represented in neighbouring Austria, in the former Polish province of Galicia, where Judaism was not only adapted to modern culture but where modern culture was adapted to Judaism. Under the influence of men like Krochmal (1785–1840), Rapoport (1790–1876), and minor luminaries a type of Judaism sprang into being which was fully alive to the exigencies of the new time, yet retained all the vigour and vitality of its past development.

As for Poland, or rather Russia,—for in the meantime the great political upheaval had transferred the Polish Empire, and with it the Jewry of Poland, into the hands of the Czars,—the *Haskalah* did not arise until a generation or two later, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Prior to it only a few solitary swallows appeared which, however, did not yet bring the *Haskalah* summer. They were out of season and they were lost.

One of these premature heralds of the *Haskalah* movement in Russia was Solomon Maimon (1754–1800), a curious personality who strikingly typifies the strength as well as the weakness of Ghetto Judaism and in a tragic manner exemplifies the

saying of the Wise King, often applied to the *Haskalah* by its opponents (Proverbs ii., 19): "None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life." The native of a Lithuanian village of the last days of Polish rule, —or rather misrule,—a veritable storehouse of Jewish learning, pressed under the yoke of matrimony at the age of twelve, this feverish seeker after truth finally fled to Germany where in a short time he became one of Germany's great philosophers. With a brilliancy of mind which penetrated the mist of the most puzzling problems of philosophy,—Kant openly acknowledged that Maimon was the only one who had fully grasped his system of thought,—he combined an utterly unphilosophic restlessness and an almost shocking tactlessness. Unbalanced, unrestrained, swayed to and fro by human foibles, he could only say with his last breath: "*Ich bin ruhig*," "I am at peace." He lived and died, away from his brethren,—one of the many victims of the *Haskalah* who never returned again and never knew how to take hold of the paths of life.

Haskalah Movement in Russia

The *Haskalah* proper begins in Russia with Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788–1860),—the Russian Mendelssohn, as he has been styled. Levinsohn, prompted by the same motives as Mendelssohn, employed the Hebrew language as a lever for

conveying modern culture to the Jews of the Polish, now the Russian, Ghetto. He became the father of that extensive *Haskalah* literature in Hebrew which for two generations was endeavouring to lure Russian Jewry from the narrowness of the Ghetto into the wide expanse of European life.

But there was a fundamental difference, as far as their progress was concerned, between the movement inaugurated by Mendelssohn and the one fathered by Levinsohn: the difference between the *Weltweiser* of Berlin and the recluse of an obscure Volhynian town; the difference also between the Prussia of Frederick the Great and the Russia of Nicholas I. In Germany, the *Aufklaerung* was, after all, a natural product of the soil. In Russia, the modern culture which the *Haskalah* was anxious to foist upon the Jews was not that of the environment, for there was no culture worth while adopting in the empire of the Iron Czar; it was the culture of Germany, imported from abroad, and for two generations we witness the curious spectacle of Russian *Maskilim*—as the adepts of the *Haskalah* were termed—imitating German enlightenment as represented by their co-religionists in that country. It was the imitation of an imitation, often reducing itself to mere outlandish superficialities.

With the *naïveté* characteristic of the early *Maskilim*, partly due to their lack of worldly experience, partly the result of their blind admira-

tion for everything German, they failed to perceive the devastating effect which the *Aufklaerung* had produced on Jewish life in Germany, believing the *Haskalah* to end with the mere harmless acquisition of the elements of modern education. And with a short-sightedness, no less surprising, they looked upon the Russian Government, the cruel taskmaster with the whip in his hands, as their natural ally in conveying enlightenment to the Jews of Russia, with results which we had occasion to comment upon in our account of the reign of Nicholas I. But the mass of the orthodox, guided by a sure natural instinct, showed a much clearer perception both of the real issues of the *Haskalah* and the true intentions of the Russian Government. They distrusted both, and subsequent events proved them to be in the right.

The prospects of emancipation which were smiling upon the Jews in the reign of Alexander II acted like a powerful stimulus upon the spread of the *Haskalah*, and, in a short time, it succeeded in modernizing the upper layer of Russian Jewry. But this modernization, instead of keeping within the bounds of Jewish tradition, as the champions of the *Haskalah* had solemnly promised, led, on the contrary, to rapid and complete de-Judaization. The Hebrew language which had been the inseparable companion of the *Haskalah* again proved to be merely a ladder to modern culture, and it was abandoned as soon as the top was reached.

In Poland, the *Haskalah* led, among the comparatively small number of its adherents, to a most radical and most repellent form of assimilation which lacks all sense of dignity and does not recoil from the baptismal font. In Russia, aided by the rapid growth of Russian culture, it proved to be the forerunner of a radical Russification, with the result that the children of the *Maskilim*, when overtaken by the anti-Jewish pogroms which inaugurated the reign of Alexander III, asked in astonishment: "*Razvye my tozhe yevreyi?*" ("Are we, too, Jews?") And the great poet of the *Haskalah*, Judah Leib Gordon (1831–1892), looking back upon a life devoted to the service of enlightenment and the cultivation of the Hebrew muses, asked in the agony of his soul:

"Who is there who can the future foresee,
And the coming events can relate unto me?
Am I not Zion's last singer, indeed?
Are you not the last who my poems can read?"

But the blood of the pogrom victims proved the seed of a new hope. Defeated *Haskalah*, finding herself at the end of her resources, invoked the aid of young and vigorous *Jewish Nationalism*.

Rise of Nationalism and Zionism

The herald of this new movement is Perez Smolenskin (1842–1885). Smolenskin was the first among the modern Hebrew writers to perceive

the shortcomings of the *Haskalah*. Having come to learn, from personal observation (he lived for many years in Vienna), the real character of modernized Judaism, he became fully aware of the disastrous consequences to which the Mendelssohnian *Aufklaerung* had led and to which, in his opinion, the Levinsohnian *Haskalah* was bound to lead. Beneath the magnificent exterior of Western European Judaism, which was the object of admiration and imitation of all Russian *Maskilim*, he found rottenness and decay, indifference and apostasy, lack of vigour and courage, a gradual paralysis of thought and sentiment, a flunkeyish readiness to surrender the national ideals of Judaism for the sake of currying favour with the non-Jews. Standing out against the gloomy background of Western European assimilation, Russian Ghetto Judaism, full of defects and deformities, but also full of life and hope, staunch and sturdy, ever keeping aloft the national ideal, assumed, in his eyes, a new, undreamt of beauty. And he realized that it was not the time to destroy, to break down the old safeguards of Judaism, but that it was rather, to quote the title of one of his books, "time to plant." Smolenskin was one of the first of his age to anticipate the modern Zionist idea and in his Hebrew monthly, which he characteristically called *Hashahar* ("the Dawn"), he preached of the glorious day which was soon to appear over a rejuvenated Jewry.

The advent of Nationalism and, later on, of Zionism marks a radical turn in the inner development of Russian Jewry. It has given a new hope to the despairing victims of Czardom. Imprisoned, like criminals, in that gigantic gaol which under the name of the Pale of Settlement Russian autocracy had artificially erected for its Jewish subjects, shut out from the sources of economic and cultural progress, humiliated in their dignity as men and threatened in their existence as Jews, their eyes longingly turned to that natural and historic Pale of Settlement where the Jewish people, while retaining all the vigour of its religious and national distinctiveness, might become a happy and useful member in the family of nations. The rays of the national revival have brought to blossom the buds of modern Hebrew literature which is no longer the stepping-stone to modern culture but the natural medium of Jewish self-expression. Zionism has called into play the inborn, though latent, energies which had almost been crushed by tyrannical oppression. It has revived the spirit of self-confidence and self-determination in Russian Jewry. True, it has also stimulated the growth of weeds, in the shape of tendencies which are subversive not only of the traditions of Polish Judaism but of Jewish tradition in general. Yet, amidst the confusing cross-currents caused by the sudden clash between the progressive influences of modernism and the conservative forces of Ghetto life, the

bulk of Russian Jewry looks forward to a future when its old fundamental ideals of *Torah* and *Abodah*, of the intellectual and practical self-assertion of Judaism, would again become the central pillars of Jewish existence.

Russian Jews in America

Russian Jewry, to use the phrase of Ahad Haam, its greatest interpreter, is now standing "at the parting of the ways." Many roads are open before it, leading out of the present chaos, and many of them will have to be trodden. Those with a pioneer spirit, who are courageous enough to blaze a path for themselves, will go to Palestine to fit the land of our fathers to become a land for our children. Others will remain in Russia and assist in the rejuvenation of the mighty giant of the North. Still others will wend their steps westward, towards the hospitable shores of our own country.

It is this latter portion of Russian Jewry which claims our particular attention in this land. For the future of American Jewry is indissolubly bound up with the future of the Russian Jews forming part of it. There is no more urgent and no more fruitful task before the Jewry of America than that of conserving the immense Jewish energy of her immigrant population and of infusing it into the growing organism of American Judaism. We are all acquainted with the wonderful story of the coal, which, as the scientists tell us, is nothing but

concentrated sunlight. It is the story of primeval forests, filled with luxurious ferns, which for years out of number had been drinking in the rays of the sun, but, having been buried beneath the ground and excluded from the reviving touch of light and air, were gradually turned into coal,—black, rugged, shapeless, yet retaining all its pristine energy which, when released, provides us with light and heat. The story of the Russian Jew is the story of the coal. Under a surface marred by oppression and persecution, he has accumulated immense stores of energy in which we may find an unlimited supply of light and heat for our minds and our hearts. All we need is to discover the process, long known in the case of the coal, of transforming latent strength into living power.

We are living at a moment when humanity is passing through one of the greatest crises in its history. The time is out of joint and our mind involuntarily turns to the mysterious "latter days," the *aharith hayyamim*, depicted in such soul-stirring colours by our ancient prophets:

And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.

But amidst the fearful gloom which threatens to engulf us, there is just one ray of light that saves us from despair. It is the hope that when the great and terrible day of the Lord will come it will not come in vain, that it will be a day of reckoning with the powers of evil, a day that will sweep out of existence all the wrong and injustice which has been accumulating for centuries in the life of mankind. And as Jews we can but fervently trust that the day which will inaugurate a happier era in the life of humanity will also mark the end of the wrong and injustice which has been so monstrously heaped upon the Jewish people. And when the Jews, now facing destruction in the empire of the Czars, will emerge from the world conflict to a free and happy existence, then will be literally fulfilled the words of their ancient seer, uttered in a moment of supreme national danger:

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

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